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Workforce and Higher Education Committee

RE: H. B. No. 6

Members of the Workforce and Higher Education Committee, thank you for the ability to provide my testimony regarding House Bill 6. My name is Paula Linscott, and I serve as the Assistant Dean for Student Support in the Russ College of Engineering and Technology at Ohio University. I am writing to you as a passionate advocate for student success and I am here to express my strong opposition to H.B. 6 (and S.B. 1) as **it undermines academic freedom and prohibits necessary classroom discussions thereby infringing on faculty free speech and dismantles critical support programs that improve student outcomes.**

This bill prohibits discussions of “controversial beliefs or policies,” as is defined by the government. Yet, the bill simultaneously defines “intellectual diversity” as the inclusion of multiple, divergent, and varied perspectives on an extensive range of public policy issues. This is a direct contradiction: how can faculty provide multiple perspectives when entire topics are off-limits? By imposing vague and sweeping restrictions on classroom discussions, this bill makes it impossible for educators to do their jobs. Professors cannot effectively teach political science, law, environmental studies, public policy, sociology, or even engineering ethics without discussing the very issues the bill restricts. This creates a chilling effect where faculty avoid critical topics out of fear of violating state law. **Silencing discussion does not promote intellectual diversity—it destroys it.**

Beyond classroom censorship, H.B. 6/S.B. 1 also forces the closure of programs that help underrepresented students succeed. Research shows that initiatives like multicultural centers, mentorship programs, and DEI efforts: Increase graduation rates, Lead to better career outcomes, Improve mental health and Decrease self-harming behaviors. The impact of these programs goes beyond academic success. They create a sense of belonging—a factor that directly correlates with mental health, retention, and student persistence. Students from underrepresented backgrounds, particularly first-generation, LGBTQ+, and BIPOC students, already face higher rates of anxiety, depression, and suicidal ideation. The programs targeted by this bill are not frivolous; they are lifelines for students. These initiatives—whether they provide mentorship, academic support, career development, or a sense of belonging—contribute directly to retention and graduation rates. Eliminating them will lead to fewer graduates at a time when higher education enrollment is already in decline. **This bill will not only harm individual students but will also weaken our state's workforce and economic competitiveness.**

Speaking from personal experience, I work closely with female engineering students who regularly face discrimination and dismissive comments from their male peers. Many have been asked questions like “Why are you even in this college if math is so hard?” These students express feelings of isolation, self-doubt, and a deep questioning of their own abilities—not because they lack talent or intelligence, but because they are repeatedly made to feel as though they do not belong. Providing these students with a dedicated space where they can connect with other women in engineering, share experiences, and build a supportive community has been invaluable. These spaces allow them to regain confidence, see successful role models, and persist in their studies despite the challenges they face. Through targeted programs, courses, and community-building efforts, we provide these students with the support they need to persist and succeed. If H.B.6/S.B. 1 passes, I will no longer be permitted to create, maintain, or collaborate to offer these crucial initiatives. **The message this sends is clear: Their struggles do not matter. Their success does not matter. But they do matter—to ME, their institutions, to our state, and to the future of innovation and progress.**

So, this leads me to question, “What is the real goal of this bill?” If the goal of education policy is student success, why would lawmakers eliminate programs that help students? Why would they ban discussions that help students engage critically with real-world issues? **The only reasonable conclusion is that this bill does not value the perspectives, voices, or success of underrepresented students and faculty.**

H.B 6/S.B. 1 does not promote “intellectual diversity” or fairness—it restricts free speech, prevents faculty from teaching effectively, and removes vital student resources. A strong education system prepares students to think critically, engage with diverse viewpoints, and develop the skills necessary to succeed. This bill does the opposite by censoring discussion and dismantling the very programs that make education more effective. For these reasons, I strongly urge the committee to reject H.B 6/S.B.1. We should be expanding access, promoting academic inquiry, and supporting student success—not enacting policies that silence faculty and harm students. Thank you for your time, and I welcome any questions.

Sincerely,

Paula A. Linscott