

Testimony of Anima Adjepong, PhD
Before the House Workforce and Higher Education Committee
Rep. Tom Young, Chair
March 11, 2025

Chair Young, Vice-Chair Ritter, Ranking Member Piccolantonio and Members of the House Workforce and Higher Education Committee

My name is Anima Adjepong. I am a professor of Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies at the University of Cincinnati, where I have taught since 2020. I hold a PhD in Sociology with certificate degrees in Women's, Gender and Sexuality Studies and African and African Diaspora Studies, and have been teaching as a professor in U.S. universities since receiving my degrees in 2017. I do not represent the University of Cincinnati. I am submitting testimony as a private citizen in opposition to Senate Bill 1.

As an educator, I will focus my opposition to the bill on the effects it will have on students. I am currently teaching a class called "Introduction to Black Women's Studies." This course offers students an opportunity to learn about the intellectual history of Black feminist thought, connect it to their lived experiences, and identify ways of working across difference towards a more just world. The course also helps students develop skills such as critical reading, oral presentation, teamwork and collaboration, diverse writing styles, research, and creative process. In my class, I have white and Black students, men and women, who chose to enroll in this course to extend their own thinking. They are all concerned about what this bill will mean for their education. For example, the bill's requirement for "Intellectual diversity," including divergent perspectives on any topic poses a challenge to the course goals. Most recently, we were discussing "controlling images," a concept that describes how negative stereotypes about Black women, including the idea that their gender is not sufficiently feminine, serves to discipline and devalue Black womanhood. Learning about the requirement of intellectual diversity in this bill, students questioned what a divergent perspective on this concept would be. Would they have to sit in classrooms that subject them to perspectives which dehumanize Black women? Regardless of their identity, my students are invested in learning theories and concepts that help them understand one another in a world that seeks to create divisions, which this bill will do in the classroom. Should SB 1 pass, it imposes an ideological litmus test of extreme neutrality in the face of injustice and seeks to disempower students as they work towards a better world.

In addition to the ideological requirements, the bill also seeks to eliminate programs that support students' overall academic development. The requirement to remove structures that seek to redress the lasting legacies of historical inequalities will hamper efforts that have only just gotten underway. The 2020 census showed that the city of Cincinnati is 46% white and 40% Black, yet the University of Cincinnati, a public regional institution, has a student body that is 64% white. This demographic breakdown does not reflect the region the university serves. This is the same university where a foundational donor, Charles McMicken's endowment contribution was interpreted to exclude all students of color from pursuing higher education. Scholarships, student centers, and admissions policies, with diversity, equity, and inclusion mandates, seek to correct these historical harms. Unless more robust anti-discrimination structures are instituted, the elimination of DEI mandates will effectively re-segregate the university.

I believe that passing this bill is bad for students, bad for higher education and bad for Ohio. I respectfully urge the Senate Higher Education Committee to consider my testimony and to vote NO on SB1. Thank you for your time and the opportunity to testify in support of this legislation.