

Testimony of Marivic Lesho, 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 Higher Education Committee:

My name is Marivic Lesho, and I am a PhD graduate of the Ohio State University, where I studied and taught from 2007-2014. I do not represent OSU (and am no longer employed there), but rather am submitting testimony as a concerned private citizen. I strongly oppose SB1 because it would severely harm higher education, free speech, and worker's rights in this state. The brain drain that would result would also eventually harm Ohio's economy, since talented students and faculty would have to relocate to another state where education is valued.

Diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) policies do not take away opportunities from any "majority" group but rather simply open the door to anyone who is qualified. It does *not* mean lowering standards for college acceptance or employment. It makes it possible for students like me, a first generation college graduate (and the daughter of an immigrant and a US military veteran), to access higher education and thrive. I received a diversity scholarship for my first year at OSU, excelled enough to be awarded a National Science Foundation dissertation grant, and now have a successful career working in tech.

During my time at OSU, I also taught several sections of two popular courses in the linguistics department: Language, Race, and Ethnicity in the US, and Language and Social Identity in the US. These courses attracted students from many different majors since they were options for fulfilling general education requirements. Students found it very eye-opening to learn how to study language scientifically and explore the rich tapestry of different dialects and languages spoken by all kinds of social groups in the US and how they came to be. Did this mean discussing "controversial" topics related to race, ethnicity, social class, and gender sometimes? Yes, but we specifically focused on listening to different points of view, learning from each other, weighing evidence, and thinking critically. On course evaluations, students frequently mentioned how much they appreciated learning about all the unique language varieties in the US, how I did not enforce any particular viewpoint on them, and hearing the perspectives of all the different students in the class.

I fear that if SB1 becomes law, despite the overwhelming public testimony against it during the Senate hearing, this type of open and honest academic environment will no longer be possible. Politicians should not have a say in what should be allowed to be taught in the classroom. The instructors are the subject matter experts and should not have to be afraid to teach anything the state deems "controversial."

I fear that future students will no longer have the same opportunities that I did in Ohio. They would have to leave the state to get a quality education. I urge the House to listen to the overwhelming public opposition to this bill and vote firmly against it. Ohio residents deserve better.