

Testimony of Heather E. Caprette, M.F.A.
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Chair Young, Vice Chair Ritter, Ranking Member Piccolantonio, and Members of the House Workforce and Higher Education Committee,

I am a native Ohioan who opposes Senate Bill 1 / House Bill 6. I will explain why.

I. It Could Ban Important Information from Being Taught

I have worked in and attended courses at public universities in Ohio since 1987. During the eight years I spent attending The Ohio State University for my undergraduate and graduate degree, I never felt like my professors were “indoctrinating” me. Indoctrinating can be a loaded word when you take it to mean that professors are teaching students to believe in a partisan, or sectarian way.

My professors taught me facts based on empirical evidence. In the humanities, my professors provided many diverse perspectives. In a comparative studies of religion course, when a professor was asked what his religion was, he said he had one but would not share it with us. That is because, in higher education, it is up to the students to form their own opinion about what is right for them.

We don’t need SB 1/HB 6 to tell faculty not to indoctrinate students in social, political or religious points of view. My fear is that instructors will not be able to talk about so called “controversial” topics, such as climate change, that we have scientific data (facts) to show is happening. It is a topic that is critical to raise awareness about. Our long-term survival depends on knowledge about it and thinking of ways to mitigate it.

II. It Will Disenfranchise Our Students and Employees

SB 1/ HB 6 aims to disenfranchise our underrepresented groups by eliminating all things related to Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion. What is the motivation behind this? DEI efforts are aimed at providing equitable access to education and economic growth for people of color, women, LGBTQ+, and other minorities. Diversity, equity, and inclusion training raises awareness about historical policies and norms that harmed these people. It educates about human bias in decision making. We cannot erase away our history of slavery in this country, and subsequent actions, such as red-lining, which separated under-represented groups, and have led to areas of poverty, crime, and detrimental health outcomes.

Let me tell you why scholarships that involve diversity, equity and inclusion principles are important. **Scholarships and grants help poor people lift themselves up out of poverty.** I am the daughter of a single mother who worked full time as a custodian for the state of Ohio. She did not get paid enough to help me pay for my college tuition. There were times when there was not enough money left over for food after she paid her other bills. I worked part-time and received the Scarlet & Gray Scholarship, the Ohio Instructional Grant, and the federal Pell grant. This helped lessen the amount of money I had to borrow in student loans to obtain my bachelor’s degree. The amount of money underrepresented groups have to pay back after graduation matters in terms of how long it takes them to achieve quality of life. By supporting and providing DEI scholarships and programming in our colleges and universities, we are providing much needed help for

underrepresented groups of people to have a chance at **breaking the chain of poverty**. Studies show that they are more likely to go to college, stay in college, and achieve a degree when they have scholarships aimed at helping them. Why do you feel the need to take this chance away from them?

We do not need SB 1/HB 6 to pass, to continue the good work that is happening in Ohio's higher education. The passage will only hinder it.

III. It Will Negatively Impact Employees' Wages and Quality of Life

SB 1/HB 6 attacks worker's rights by prohibiting unionized employees from striking, including all employees of public retiree systems as well as faculty. This affects me as a member of SEIU participating in OPERS. Since I started working in my position at CSU in 2010, I have noticed that our salary increases do not keep up with inflation. This leaves us slipping behind financially. It is going to force employees into a situation where we must work long past retirement age or take on part time work on top of a full-time job, because we need to be able to afford the necessities of a quality life. I estimated, with inflation, that healthcare expenses alone will eat up a third of my OPERS pension. Taking the right to strike away from bargaining unions **takes away a key tool we need to ensure fair negotiations, and fair wages**. Without this right, without fair wages, you will drive away employees who have dedicated their lives to Ohio's colleges and universities, and our students.

I know from a 2020 SEIU negotiation with CSU that when the university gives zero percent as a raise for three years in a row, we lose long-time, dedicated employees. Some take jobs out of Ohio.

Faculty and students are currently saying they want to leave Ohio if SB 1/HB 6 passes. With the "demographic cliff" and decreasing college enrollment at a national level, **we cannot afford to lose our students to other states**.

Higher education has many challenges that are not addressed by SB 1/HB 6. For example, the state has underfunded maintenance on the aging buildings we work in. This January, we had an office that holds six employees drop down to 46 degrees Fahrenheit within Rhodes Tower at Cleveland State University. The original heating system built in 1970 was not working anymore. We experience flooding that runs through the floors and elevator shafts on a regular basis. We get frequent notices that our elevators are not working. We deal with mold and insects in our environment. We need a bill that solves issues of aging infrastructure, funds staffing and addresses the rising cost of tuition and greater student debt.

Respectfully, I ask that you reject these bills, which could do real, irreversible damage to Ohio higher education. Please VOTE NO ON SB 1/HB 6!

Thank you,

Heather E. Caprette, M.F.A.