

March 9, 2025

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

Submitted by Marla Szoradi
Resident of Vermilion Township, Erie County, Ohio

Thank you for allowing me to provide my testimony. My name is Marla Szoradi, and I am a resident of Vermilion Township in Erie County. I previously submitted opposition testimony on February 8, 2025, and I am deeply troubled that, despite overwhelming public opposition, this bill was still approved by the Senate committee.

Once again, it is clearly seen that this bill perpetuates systemic racism and the suppression of underrepresented communities—not only in Ohio but across the United States. I would like to highlight three more points that support my opposition to this bill:

1. The Origin of Indoctrination

Indoctrination does not begin in higher education—it begins at home, from birth, and continues to evolve through life experiences. Children are not blank slates when they enter college; they carry with them the realities of their upbringing, identities, and the systemic barriers they have faced.

A child born with a disability often encounters obstacles due to inadequate accommodations and a lack of societal empathy. A child of color will inevitably experience systemic racism that limits access to opportunities and social acceptance. LGBTQ+ individuals frequently endure isolation and mental health struggles due to rejection from their families, peers, and communities. These deeply ingrained social inequities are not created in college classrooms, nor can they be erased by silencing discussions about them. Higher education is not a place of indoctrination—it is a place of inquiry, growth, and the pursuit of truth.

2. Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Policies Are Not Optional

If there is one defining characteristic of the anti-DEI movement, it is a misguided attempt to return our country to an imagined past that no longer exists—and never truly did for many Americans.

Historically, when marginalized communities have fought for their rights, resistance has always followed. In 1964, Congress passed the Civil Rights Act, outlawing discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex, or national origin. However, this landmark legislation did not immediately eliminate systemic oppression. Voter suppression remained rampant, particularly in the South, where Black citizens were met with literacy tests, poll taxes, and intimidation. In Selma, Alabama, when activists peacefully protested for voting rights, the response was brutal: local authorities issued an injunction prohibiting public gatherings of more than two people. This

led to the infamous events of "Bloody Sunday" on March 7, 1965, when peaceful demonstrators were violently attacked by law enforcement on the Edmund Pettus Bridge.

We must acknowledge that without intentional policies to promote diversity, equity, and inclusion, history will repeat itself. Efforts to dismantle DEI initiatives are not about fairness or neutrality—they are about erasing progress. If we eliminate DEI policies, we reinforce a system that has historically privileged certain groups while silencing and excluding others.

3. Legislators Should Be Required to Study the Histories of Marginalized Communities

If policymakers wish to govern effectively, they must first seek to understand the diverse communities they represent. A bill should be introduced requiring all elected officials to complete coursework in Women's History, Black History, LGBTQ+ Studies, and Disability Studies. When lawmakers fail to acknowledge historical injustices and lived experiences, they risk making uninformed decisions that harm their constituents.

Final Thoughts

SB 1 is not about strengthening Ohio's higher education system—it is about censorship, control, and regression. It undermines the principles of academic freedom, restricts necessary conversations about equity and justice, and sends a chilling message to students and educators alike.

I urge you to reject SB 1. Ohio deserves an education system that fosters critical thinking, inclusivity, and the pursuit of knowledge—not one that silences voices and rewrites history.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Marla Szoradi
Sincerely,
Marla Szoradi