

Testimony of Gray Blandford
Before the House Higher Education Committee
Representative Tom Young, Chair
March 9, 2025

Chair Young, Vice-Chair Ritter, Ranking Member Piccolantonio and members of the Higher Education Committee.

My name is Gray Blandford. I am a fourth-year undergraduate student at the University of Cincinnati, majoring in Environmental Studies with a minor in Spanish. I am testifying in solidarity with my fellow students, as a private citizen, to express my strong opposition to Senate Bill 1. In no way do I represent the beliefs of the University of Cincinnati. I am deeply concerned about how this bill could negatively impact the education and future of students across our state. I am particularly alarmed by section 3345.0217 of SB1 regarding diversity, equity, and inclusion.

The main reason that I chose to pursue my undergraduate degree at the University of Cincinnati was because of the diversity that the university and city possess. I grew up attending predominantly white, Catholic, private schools and yearned to live and learn in a place that fostered an inclusive atmosphere and encouraged a variety of perspectives. I attended the same school from preschool through eighth grade and grew up with essentially the same group of 30-40 peers and attended high school with most of them as well. My world felt narrow and limited, and it took me far too long to exist in a place where I felt comfortable look inwards and discover my own queer identity. When I moved to Cincinnati for college, it was almost like I could physically feel myself blossoming. My classrooms were no longer stagnant and rigid like they were when I was growing up. Now, at UC, they were filled with people of diverse ethnicities, nationalities, religions, gender identities, sexual orientations, and unique life experiences. I felt a wave of relief washing over me, knowing that I too would be valued, and I didn't have to hide my identity any longer. The cultures and diverse people I have met and forged relationships with throughout my time here have been beautiful and valuable. Whether it was chatting with international students about their holiday traditions, learning about my professor's experiences in their home countries, or having the opportunity to work with diverse students in classroom or laboratory settings, I believe these experiences have helped me learn and grow as a person. It is so important to broaden one's horizons.

Diversity in higher education is crucial, as it fosters an inclusive atmosphere that encourages the exchange of different perspectives, promotes critical thinking, and prepares students to engage in a globalized world. The diversity found in universities enhances not only academic growth but also personal development, helping students to become well-rounded individuals who can contribute meaningfully to society. Students deserve to attend a school that supports and values

them. This bill is concerning and disappointing to the future of students who hope to find a beautifully diverse home at higher education institutions in Ohio. I urge you to vote NO on Senate Bill 1.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Gray Blandford