

Testimony to the Ohio House Workforce and Higher Education Committee on SB 1  
Ariel Miller, Cincinnati, Ohio

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

Thank you for allowing me to submit testimony on SB 1. My name is Ariel Miller. I am writing to you as a 72-year-old white Christian voter who has been striving all my adult life to advance dignity and equal opportunity for all Americans. This is about integrity: walking the talk of my faith and of the civic values I hope you share.

SB 1 undermines that integrity by blocking our public universities from teaching honestly about the harm caused by racism, both individual and institutional. This is like forbidding medical faculty to teach students about the symptoms and causes of diseases. Suppressing facts doesn't change those facts: instead, it cheats students of the knowledge they need to heal them.

Racism is alive and terrifyingly real in Ohio. Threatening letters to Ohio universities from the federal government and fast-tracking of SB 1 through this legislative session have created an environment enabling racists to terrorize communities including Springfield, Columbus, and Lincoln Heights with impunity.

On Feb. 9, I stood on the I-75 overpass between Evendale and Lincoln Heights with hundreds of Lincoln Heights clergy and citizens and many friends from nearby Episcopal congregations. They came together for a prayer rally following the shock and trauma of the Feb. 7 demonstration on that overpass by masked Neo-Nazis, several carrying firearms.

The Neo-Nazis brandished swastika flags on the overpass towards Lincoln Heights - a historic Black municipality - with a banner proclaiming that America is for white people. This happened shortly before children were dismissed from Lincoln Heights Elementary just up the hill. My friend, Lincoln Heights Elementary Principal Dawn Bailey, rapidly organized a change in bus routes so the children would not see these terrifying men. Other friends, including the executive director of an Episcopal youth center in Lincoln Heights, rushed to the overpass to bravely confront the demonstrators. Thanks be to God, none of them was shot!

Lincoln Heights residents have been hit with several subsequent attacks of racist intimidation on social media, and by a member of the KKK dropping racist flyers on Lincoln Heights streets in the middle of the night.

In 2020, the Ohio School Board reviewed data from over 700 school districts showing a pattern of systemic racial inequity in our public schools. The School Board passed a resolution to work to overcome this. Leaders in Ohio Legislature pressured the Board to

rescind the resolution. **We have work to do, and it's crucial for white Ohioans - including all of you entrusted with elected office - to listen to and heed the experience of Ohioans from minority groups.** Ohio students who will serve as teachers, lawyers, social workers, judges, and elected officials need to build the integrity and skills to diagnose inequity and to repair it.

My Christian upbringing gave me the gift of confession. We measure our actions against our moral standards, commit to changing those behaviors that violate these ethics, and strive to follow through on our commitment to reform. In the Episcopal church, we carry out an examination of conscience together in worship every Sunday. **It is incredibly refreshing to be given this weekly opportunity to find a more loving path, working to live with increasing integrity.**

Similarly, our civic life's best chance for integrity and health comes when we can freely examine our political and economic behavior in the light of the standards expressed in the Declaration of Independence, which you include as required reading in the bill's American Civic Literacy section: "We hold these truths to be self-evident - that all men are created equal...with certain inalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness. -- That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed."

It was shocking that the Ohio Senate passed SB 1 less than 24 hours after more than 800 citizens submitted testimony opposing it. Only 14 people testified in favor in addition to the sponsor. **How is fast-tracking this bill consistent with the consent of the governed?**

**Please stop SB 1, which treats those who want to heal racism as the problem, not the reality of racism itself.** You are on the right track in including Dr. Martin Luther King's "Letter from a Birmingham Jail" in the required reading. Addressing white religious leaders who criticized the nonviolent demonstrations against egregious injustice, he writes, "you deplore the demonstrations taking place in Birmingham. But your statement, I am sorry to say, fails to express a similar concern for the conditions that brought about the demonstrations. I am sure that none of you would want to rest content with the superficial kind of social analysis that deals merely with effects and does not grapple with underlying causes. It is unfortunate that demonstrations are taking place in Birmingham, but it is even more unfortunate that the city's white power structure left the Negro community with no alternative." Dr. King goes on to document the facts with blazing clarity.

I ask you to consider my testimony and vote NO on SB 1.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify.