

Dear Chair Young, Vice Chair Ritter, Ranking Member Piccolantonio, and Members Abdullahi, Dovilla, John, Manning, Miller, Richardson, Santucci, Tims, Williams, and Workman.

Thank you for allowing me to submit this written testimony today. My name is Lindsay Starkey, and I am a citizen of Ohio, living in North Canton, Stark County, House District 48. I happen to be a professor at Kent State University, but I wish to testify today as a citizen of this state. I was born here and after completing my graduate training, I moved back to Ohio to work because I wanted to contribute to helping the students of Ohio just as my teachers had done for me.

I ask that you consider my testimony and vote “no” on SB1. It is a dangerous bill that threatens the quality of education students can receive in this state as well as the state’s ability to attract top-tier educators and students to work and study at our public universities, yet again denying Ohio students the educations they deserve.

Though the bill has been described as enabling free speech in Ohio’s public universities, it will actually have the opposite effect. Rather than having experts teach what the cutting-edge methods in their fields suggest about a particular subject, they will be forced by this bill to treat opinions without evidence-based merit as on par with what the evidence has taught them as experts in their field. Confusing evidence-based hypotheses with opinions will only harm our students as they step into the workforce.

The bill’s attacks on so-called “DEI” will also harm our students’ education and preparation for a twenty-first-century workforce. “DEI” is a relatively new term, but the idea that universities should provide a place where people of different physical and mental abilities, economic levels, genders, and races should all be welcome stretches back to the 1960s. Ending these programs could endanger the support that all students need to have equal access to education. Doing so will only force out the most vulnerable of our students and force the students who are able to continue their education without these supports to interact with more and more people who are exactly like they are. This lack of interacting with people who come from different backgrounds can only hurt our students as they move into a workforce that increasingly calls on them to work with people from across the United States and even the globe.

Finally, this bill will keep gifted students and educators from coming to teach and study in Ohio, again harming the educational opportunities for our students. Neither gifted students nor exceptional educators will come to a public university in Ohio when the law requires faculty to teach based on both their expertise and people’s opinions and does not provide the support for students of many different backgrounds to succeed. The lack of these high-quality educators and students will mean that those of us teaching and learning at public universities in Ohio will be deprived of the most gifted scholars, once again harming the education of our students.

Again, I ask you to vote “no” on the harmful SB1. Thank you again for the opportunity to testify in writing.

Lindsay Starkey