

Chair Roegner, Vice Chair Cirino, Ranking Member Ingram, and members of the Senate Higher Education Committee,

Thank you for allowing me to testify today. My name is Linda Conway. I am a School Psychologist from the Cincinnati area. I've been practicing for nearly 30 years and consider myself, first and foremost, an advocate for children. I am strongly opposed to SB 1 and its companion bill HB 6.

My professional and personal ethics compel me to respect the inherent worth and dignity of all people. That includes people of color, individuals with disabilities, LGBTQIA+ individuals, women and girls, religious minorities, those affected by poverty, immigrants, those in larger bodies, neurodiverse persons, and other historically underrepresented or disadvantaged individuals. We cannot allow these persons to be seen as anything less than fully human. As a school psychologist and child advocate, my role is to protect and advocate for all students—not just because it is my livelihood, but because it is the right thing to do.

Early in my career, someone once called me an idealist as an insult. At first, I took it to heart, but over time, I've come to embrace the label. Idealists push for a better world—we see what is possible and refuse to settle for less. That is why I am speaking out. I am reaching for a better world, a stronger nation, and a more just Ohio for all.

Ohio SB 1 threatens the very foundation of education—critical thinking, inclusivity, and the well-being of all students. By restricting discussions on systemic racism, health disparities, and other so-called "controversial" topics, this bill stifles intellectual growth and prevents students from engaging with real-world issues. An education that does not challenge misinformation or encourage difficult but necessary conversations leaves students ill-prepared for the complexities of life. The inability to correct blatant falsehoods, such as Holocaust denial, not only undermines historical and scientific truth but also sends a dangerous message that facts are subjective and open to distortion.

Beyond the harm to academic integrity, this bill directly jeopardizes the mental health and success of all students by suppressing discussions around identity, privilege, and discrimination. Diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives provide essential support systems, mentorship, and opportunities for historically underrepresented students. Their removal will further alienate those who already face systemic barriers, increasing feelings of isolation and invalidation. Additionally, banning Diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts and student organizations that promote identity-based support networks will make educational spaces less welcoming—not just for students, but for faculty as well. This will ultimately drive away talented educators who value inclusivity, weakening the overall quality of education. Rather than fostering a robust and informed student body, SB 1 promotes ignorance, exclusion, and fear—outcomes I cannot, in good conscience, support.

As a first year college student in 1988 at Wittenberg University I was part of the first class to benefit from a course known as "Common Learning." This course exposed us to the real world issues of racism, sexism and artificial intelligence. I am forever grateful for this experience because it was the first time in my life that I understood and could name the sexism, misogyny, and gender-based violence that I had already experienced as an 18 year old young woman. It allowed me to finally advocate for myself effectively and to embrace my own agency. I realize that this type of experience is exactly what many of you are hoping to destroy and I cannot be complicit in its demise. I ask you to consider my testimony and vote NO on this destructive bill.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify.