

March 9, 2025

Re: Opposition Testimony: Senate Bill 1 / House Bill 6

My name is Dr. Michael Flatt, and I am a professor of sociology at Cuyahoga Community College. I am submitting this testimony as a private citizen and not as a representative of Cuyahoga Community College. I am also a first-generation college student who personally knows the myriad challenges that face Ohio students as they work to make a better life for themselves through higher education. I am writing to voice my strong dissent of this bill, which was rushed through the Senate, ignores the overwhelming opposition of Ohio voters, and instead stands to fan the flames of the culture wars with no actual regard for the success of Ohio's students.

The cost of education, the complicated bureaucracy of financial aid, and the high cost of living all conspire to keep working class young people stranded in the economic strata in which they are born. Removing programming that supports marginalized students under the current fashionable attack of the vague, if ever defined, concepts of diversity, equity, and inclusion will only result in the loss of talent from Ohio's colleges and universities. Moreover, the malicious language removing decades of work towards racial equality in our state schools will not go unnoticed in our history. The legislature has an opportunity to support students of color and to stop using acronyms such as "CRT" and "DEI" as straw men to avoid engaging in real conversations about what students need and how we can work together to actually improve Ohio's schools. I call on you to do better than riding the current wave of hateful rhetoric and, instead, speak to our students of color to understand that the programs you are proposing to eliminate are lifelines of opportunity that need to be protected instead of vilified.

Beyond the revocation of support for Ohio's students, this bill serves as an attack on the labor of those of us who work in higher education. The overreach on academic freedom, suggesting that legislators are better positioned to build curricula, is the functional equivalent of these same legislators admitting that college professors are much better lawmakers than themselves, a suggestion I am hard-pressed to think would be accepted. It is especially curious how the party that has built its reputation on small government seems to be suggesting that state government should now be reaching into the far corners of every single college classroom, setting up additional bureaucratic offices of oversight and review; all while giving no indication as to who is going to pay for all these new expenses.

Putting aside the blatant irony, there is the matter of supposed free expression at hand. This mythology of the silenced voice in the college classroom is just that: a myth. In fact, the voices of students who opposed this bill in passionate and eloquent terms were ignored during Senate testimony. It seems that the Ohio legislature is where the majority is silenced, not classrooms on college campuses. This testimony stands as an official invite for any Ohio legislator thinking of supporting this harmful legislation to come visit my classroom. There you can see that the environment, as with my colleagues across the state, is designed to foster open dialogue, critical thought, and the use of logic and empirical evidence, rather than group membership or emotion, to help students draw their own conclusions.

I ask the same of you today as I ask my students: let open dialogue, critical thought, and the use of logic and empirical evidence win over partisan politics. Oppose this harmful bill.

Sincerely,

Michael Flatt, Ph.D