

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

Thank you for taking the time to view my testimony regarding Senate Bill 1. My name is Nathaniel Goston, I am 18 years old, and I am an undergraduate at UC Blue Ash beginning a degree in Environmental Studies. I have over 800 recorded hours of volunteering experience in on-site conservation work, such as habitat restoration, invasive species removal, propagation of native plant species, and monitoring of vernal pool amphibian populations, stream habitat quality, and bird populations. I am strongly opposed to Senate Bill 1.

My main concern is the language in the bill regarding “controversial topics”, specifically prohibiting colleges and universities from taking a stance on these issues. While I understand the impulse to encourage a diversity of opinion and viewpoints in classroom discussion, I worry that this part of the bill may overshadow scientific consensus. For example, the assertion that climate change exists and is caused by human activity is near unanimously held by the scientific community (Lynas et al. 2021), but it has been a politically controversial topic recently (Marquardt and Lederer 2022). I am concerned that, should this bill pass, it will inhibit the ability of professors to discuss climate change in this context. This goes for other topics labeled as controversial in the bill as well, such as racism, gender, and sexuality.

I am also concerned about DEI programs being discontinued should this bill pass. Again, I understand the place where the language in the bill comes from; I also believe that all students, regardless of socioeconomic status, race, gender, sex, age, ability, or any other part of their identity or circumstances, should be treated equally. However, I do not understand how getting rid of DEI programs will help to accomplish this goal. I certainly believe they can be improved; for example, I think socioeconomic status is underrepresented in terms of systemic inequality, and I believe support groups similar to LGBTQ+ and POC alliances that represents groups of people from systematically neglected communities (e.g, Appalachia) would be valuable additions to DEI in higher education and beyond. Nonetheless, and I cannot emphasize this enough, getting rid of DEI programs is not a solution to anything. It will only harm students, faculty, and the state as a whole.

I urge you to consider my testimony and vote NO on this bill. Thank you, and I appreciate your honoring my right to participate in our democratic system.