

Opposition Testimony of Michelle Huang HB6 House Workforce & Higher Education Committee

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

Thank you for allowing me to testify today. My name is Michelle Huang, and I am currently a junior at Olentangy Liberty High School and also dually enrolled at Columbus State Community College. Today, I stand before you in strong opposition of HB6 and its companion bill, SB1.

I grew up here in bustling Columbus, and like most of my peers, I've really embraced becoming a Buckeye. From attending football games to attending the annual Fischer alumni dinners, attending OSU was always something in the back of my mind. The idea of studying political science in a city I've grown up in, with all the educational and financial benefits of staying in-state, made OSU the perfect choice for me. But if SB1 passes, everything changes. This bill's attack on diversity and inclusion initiatives really eliminates the qualities of OSU that made it such an alluring possibility in the first place; this bill seeks to rid the scholarships and programs that have grounded OSU's unique campus and academic culture for decades. Additionally, the thought that Ohio's public universities might no longer be places where I can freely engage in critical discussions about politics, history, and social issues makes me question if staying in Ohio is still a viable option. The loss of these opportunities is not just a financial or academic concern; it's about whether I will be able to receive the education that will allow me to grow into the person I aspire to be. If this bill becomes law, I will have no choice but to look outside Ohio for my future.

Interestingly enough, like its prior iteration, SB83, this bill places a particular emphasis on 'Intellectual Diversity' while also restricting open discourse on 'controversial' topics in classrooms. In fact, the language underlying these free speech restrictions is as nebulous as the last bill – allowing students to “reach their own conclusions” without any possible interference from an instructor is egregious beyond anything I could possibly articulate today. A student could literally deny the very existence of the Holocaust without any kind of correction – not only is this bill censoring nuanced academic discourse, it is literally toppling the very pillars of factuality which any kind of discourse stands upon.

But most importantly, from the perspective as a student preparing for college, I worry that these vague limitations will prevent me from engaging in critical conversations about history, politics, and social issues—conversations that are essential to my growth

as an informed citizen. And as representatives, you too should understand that empowering younger Ohioans to become civically engaged citizens is quintessential to the future of our government and beyond. But I pose the question: How can this generation of students learn if we aren't exposed to the open discourse that this bill seeks to suppress?

I ask you to consider my testimony and vote NO on this harmful bill. Ohio students deserve an education that encourages thought, not one that stifles it.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify.