

## **Testimony of Devon Skufca**

Before the House Higher Education Committee

Representative Tom Young, Chair

**March 11, 2025**

Good Morning. Thank you Chair Young, Vice Chair Ritter, Ranking Member Piccolantonio, and members of the House Workforce and Higher Education Committee for allowing me to testify today. My name is Devon Skufca and I am here to urge you to vote NO on Senate Bill 1.

I currently attend a private higher educational institution, and desire to become an academic as my career goals. These few years at my higher education institution have been transformative for me. I have been introduced to a plethora of unique and important stories, backgrounds, educational perspectives, and point of views. When I say my time at college has been transformative, that is not an understatement. It has been crucial in my identity formation. However, I have been able to experience these essential experiences only as my father could afford to send me to higher-education. Whether that be a public or private institution, if I did not have my fathers support, higher-education would be a different conversation for me. This is why when I see specific aspects of this bill I am incredibly concerned. Beginning with prohibitions on any DEI scholarships. DEI scholarships are not handouts and do not give students an unfair advantage. They correct historical wrongs that make higher education far less accessible for certain individuals — and aim to combat the unfair advantage that some receive (such as me) due to a parent's ability to accumulate wealth, while this ability was denied to others. Stick with me. I think of the historically redlined areas of Cleveland, which made it more difficult for

African-Americans to accumulate wealth through homeownership, as they were forced to pay bloated home payments, and often denied access to home ownership through explicit segregation by the Federal Housing Association and others. Are you telling me that a young adult who succeeds academically, but faces barriers as a result of this one example of historical injustice, should be denied access to higher education? What if their parents cannot afford to send their child to college, as they have not had the same opportunity to accumulate wealth as another family. Redlining maps directly correlate with poverty maps today — this is important to note. DEI scholarships remove these unfair barriers to higher-education, and work to ensure all are able to participate in our educational systems and vibrant democracy. Second, I think of the importance of DEI training and spaces, especially for me. I grew up in an area where there was little interaction with individuals from different racial and socioeconomic backgrounds. Growing up in a suburb of Cleveland, my experiences have been somewhat uniform. This is why DEI is so essential — it has opened my eyes to the experiences of individuals from different backgrounds as me and exhibits that the American experience IS NOT uniform — it is diverse. Diversity is what makes America, and Ohio, so rich in spirit. There is beauty in honing into this. We should not be banning DEI, we should be investing more into it. DEI works to include people from all aspects of society — from different social classes, different beliefs, different races, and different abilities. DEI spaces are not exclusionary, and my experience with them proves this. Yes, they do the essential work of ensuring all voices are heard, and everyone (especially from marginalized backgrounds) feels welcomed. But, they also work to make EVERYONE feel welcomed. Taking this away would be like taking the color out of a painting — we are not only denying opportunities to groups and individuals who do not have the same chance as everyone else, but we are ignoring what makes our society so special: its diversity. Passing this bill would

send a dark message to our citizens — that higher education is only for a select few in Ohio, and groups that work to make people feel welcome, included, and, to ensure the fruits of all peoples hard work is realized — principles central to our belief in meritocracy and equal opportunity — are not welcome. Please consider voting no on this bill.

Thank you for taking the time to listen to my testimony today. I ask you to take my testimony to heart and vote NO on this bill before it harms the education of Ohioans. I am happy to take any questions you may have.