

Opponent Testimony for SB1

Workforce and Higher Education Committee Meeting

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Chair Young, Vice Chair Ritter, Ranking Member Piccolantonio, and members of the Workforce and Higher Education Committee, thank you for allowing me to testify today.

My name is Dr. Scarlett Rebman. I am a historian of modern U.S. history. A proud Ohioan, I was born and raised in Mansfield, and I graduated from high school and college in this great state. As an educator, I most recently worked as a part-time history instructor at a private university in Ohio. I am here today to oppose S.B. 1 and to express my concern about the negative impacts it will have on Ohio's state institutions of higher education. This morning, I am addressing specifically the parts of the bill related to Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion.

If this bill were enacted, I would never teach at a state institution of higher education because it would hinder my ability to educate the young people in my classroom.

I wonder how many college classrooms this bill's supporters have visited lately? Let me paint you a picture of mine. I typically teach the second half of the United States history survey, which begins with Reconstruction and ends in the twenty-first century. The first thing we do in my class

is read and analyze each section of the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Amendments, which abolished slavery, established African American citizenship, and granted voting rights to Black men, respectively. We refer to these Amendments throughout the rest of the course as we examine how concepts of citizenship evolved over time.

Studying history is like peeling back the layers of an onion. No matter how smooth and straightforward a topic may appear on the surface, the more questions we ask, the more layers reveal themselves. After taking my course, I hope my students leave with the idea that they should question everything: primary sources, history textbooks, their peers, and, yes, their professors.

If my students were discussing SB 1 in class, I would ask them to consider:

- Why was this bill being introduced now? In other words, what are the social and political contexts in which this bill was created?
- What problem(s) is this bill addressing?
- Who would this bill help? Harm?
- What is included in this bill, and what is missing?

I would break students into small groups to discuss with their peers while I circulated through the classroom, answering questions and posing additional questions of my own. For example, I would ask: Does this bill define the terms diversity, equity, and inclusion? If not, why not?

Since the bill does not, in fact, define the terms, I would encourage students to locate several definitions through their own research. Let me share one from the American Psychological Association:

Equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) is a conceptual framework that promotes the fair treatment and full participation of all people, especially populations that have historically been underrepresented or subject to discrimination because of their background, identity, disability, etc.

Equity involves providing resources according to the need to help diverse populations achieve their highest state of health and other functioning. Diversity refers to the representation or composition of various social identity groups in a work group, organization, or community.

Inclusion strives for an environment that offers affirmation, celebration, and appreciation of different approaches, styles, perspectives, and experiences.¹

Taking this definition into consideration, I would ask students to discuss: What makes diversity, equity, and inclusion controversial, as it is described in Section 3345.0217 on the bottom of page 21 of the bill?

Let me state unequivocally that a commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion is foundational to my profession as a historian. My years of study, research, and writing have only deepened my commitment to DEI, and I expect students in my classroom to participate in ways that affirm these values.

In the name of “intellectual diversity,” am I to allow a student in my class to state that he believes slavery was “not that bad”? That the horrors of the Holocaust are exaggerated, or

¹ <https://www.apa.org/topics/equity-diversity-inclusion>, accessed 9 March 2025.

perhaps that the Holocaust did not occur at all? If I challenge a student expressing one of these positions, what would happen when that student submits a complaint to which the university is *required to respond*, as stated in Section 3345.0217, page 26?

Let's be honest, if DEI is ideological, then banning DEI is also ideological. In a democratic society, there is little that is not controversial, ideological, or political. Equipping students to discuss and debate controversial topics with intellectual rigor is the role of higher education. To dictate how this takes place is legislative overreach.

If signed into law, this bill would undermine academic freedom and have a chilling effect on college classrooms across the state. Students will graduate unequipped to participate in our society. Many of the best and brightest students will simply choose not to attend a state institution of higher education.

As a historian and educator, I ask that you please consider my testimony and vote no on S.B. 1.

Thank you. I'm happy to answer any questions.