

Testimony of Sabrina Estevez
Before the House Workforce and Higher Education Committee
11 March 2025

Chair Young, Vice Chair Ritter, Ranking Member Piccolantonio, and members of the House Committee:

I am Sabrina Estevez. I am a second-year student at The Ohio State University working towards an international studies and political science double major. I value and cherish my strong public education growing up, I was raised in a military family, and I have lived in Ohio for most of my life.

I don't have to be here today. I live hours away, woke up at 4 AM, and took time away from family and friends to be here. OSU is on spring break this week, as is Ohio University, Kent State University, Cleveland State University, and several other universities across the state, amounting to **tens of thousands** of students with a vested interest in this piece of legislation likely too far from this building to share their thoughts with you – but I think you knew that. I shouldn't have to be here today. The truth is, however, I **need** to be here; not just for myself and for my education, but for every other student and prospective student of Ohio higher education.

I stand firmly against Senate Bill 1 not just because of its fundamental misconceptions of what higher education looks like in Ohio, but because of the lies it tells to myself and others about how to earn a spot in our Ohio universities via 'merit', casting doubt on diversity, equity, and inclusion programs across the board. In the status quo, per pupil spending for public Ohio K-12 students sat at an average of \$15,492 in FY2023.¹ This, however, is contrasted by the mass amounts of investment that are offered to children in private schools, with private K-12 educations costing, in some areas, more than \$70,000 per pupil per year.² The reality of this vast inequality in education spending amounts to one common denominator: meritocratic children are **privileged** children. When this legislative body calls for a return to merit-based systems, it denies the **endless** other factors at play for Ohio students. Meritocracy shows benevolence to those who have the time, money, and capacity to invest in it – while excluding countless others.

And when you choose to exclude the lived experiences of Ohioans in your legislative decisions, you fail us. You fail the diverse, hard-working, all-important communities and constituents that you are here to represent. Senate Bill 1 is a clear-cut example of our legislature not responding to the calls of its people, working with interest groups and politicians rather than students and professors, and providing solvency to non-issues.

¹ Ohio Legislative Service Commission

² Education Data Initiative

At the end of the day, students are resilient. University faculty and staff are resilient. But what will not recover from Senate Bill 1 is the pockets of Ohioans and **your** purse. If you pass this bill, you sow the seeds of a mass exodus of university students, leaving the economy, workforce, health, and reputation of the state of Ohio worse off than how you found it.

Fail this bill.

I yield to the chair and I am now open for questions.