

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

Thank you for allowing me to submit testimony against SB 1.

My name is Zoé White, I am a senior at the University of Cincinnati studying Marketing with a minor in International Business. I am very active on campus as I serve on multiple committees, e-boards, ambassadors and a mentor throughout my eight involvements on campus.

I am writing to express my deep concern regarding the potential impact of Ohio Senate Bill 1 on programs, academics and the students at our university.

I want to share my personal experiences with DEI initiatives at the University of Cincinnati and how they have positively impacted my academic and personal growth. As a student who has benefitted from programs focused on inclusion and community building, I feel compelled to share how these initiatives have not only shaped my journey but also strengthened my sense of belonging and purpose.

One of the most significant experiences for me has been being awarded the Darwin T. Turner Scholar Program, which provides a four-year, full-tuition scholarship. It is a scholarship named after the youngest black male to graduate from the University of Cincinnati at the age of 16. Being selected for this program is a testament to my commitment to leadership, community service, and academic excellence. Through the Turner Scholar program, I have had the opportunity to support fellow students, both within the program and beyond, by fostering an inclusive environment where leadership and collaboration are at the forefront. This program also offers mentorship and leadership opportunities, where students are guided and empowered to continue enhancing the program for current and future students of the program.

Additionally, my role as a Transitions Mentor through the African American Cultural Resource Center (AACRC) has been another meaningful part of my university experience. My fellow mentors and I, have guided black freshmen students through a series of weekly workshops designed to help them navigate the transition into college life. This program called Transitions has not only supported my mentees, but it has also had a profound positive impact on me, reinforcing the importance of community and support in higher education. You can see the difference being in this program makes on a student's life especially with a drastic change that is college.

I am also a proud member of Business Fellows, an organization for underrepresented students within the Lindner College of Business. This group provides a space for students to come together and participate in workshops on resume building, mock interviews, career fair preparation, and more. These efforts help to level the playing field for students who may face a lack of opportunities in business and offer unique experiences to build skills necessary for success in the workforce. Business Fellows is an invaluable community for students like me, where we can build our networks and prepare for internships and real-world business situations. Business fellows have brought me great success personally as I have been able to grow more confident, obtain internship experiences, and there are several students just like me who feel the same way.

In addition to these experiences, I am also involved in two women-based honoraries, where I've had the chance to celebrate the accomplishments of women on campus and the broader impact we continue to make. Being a part of these organizations has given me a space where I can uplift and empower other women while also contributing to the development of leadership skills. The importance of having spaces that allow us to thrive and take on leadership roles cannot be overstated. These organizations provide an inclusive environment that helps all members grow and succeed. There is no better feeling than being around like-minded women and being in spaces that encourage support, collaboration and success.

What makes these experiences even more meaningful is the fact that these DEI initiatives were created to address the underrepresentation of students of color and other marginalized groups. Having access to spaces that foster a sense of belonging and provide the tools needed to succeed has been invaluable. The African American Cultural Resource Center, Women's Center, the Office of EPS, Business Fellows and more, have created a community where I feel supported and at home. These organizations have given me the opportunity to be my authentic self while knowing that I am in a space where all students are welcomed. As someone who had a hard first semester of college, it was these spaces that helped me meet people and get more acclimated to campus and all that UC has to offer.

Moreover, I want to highlight the importance of having spaces like the LGBTQ Center on campus. These centers are vital for students who may feel marginalized or underrepresented, providing them with a sense of belonging and support. It is essential that universities continue to foster inclusive environments where all students, regardless of their identity, can thrive. We want students from all backgrounds and identities to feel supported and valued at the university. Taking away safe places can harm that sense of belonging and cause students to question if they matter to the university or if they're just another statistic to the increase of enrollment UC is proud to claim.

The DEI programs at UC have made an indelible impact on my college experience and personal growth. They have allowed me to step into leadership roles, access critical mentorship, and connect with others in meaningful ways. I strongly believe that the preservation and expansion of

these initiatives are crucial for the success and well-being of all students. It is not about separation. I urge the Senate to consider the immense value these programs bring to universities and the future of our communities.

I feel it is crucial to highlight the challenges that would arise if these initiatives were removed and how it would negatively affect students, staff, and the campus community as a whole.

Programs such as the Turner Scholar Program, the African American Cultural Resource Center (AACRC), and Business Fellows provide invaluable support and mentorship for students. If these programs were eliminated, students from underrepresented backgrounds would lose critical resources that help them navigate academic and professional challenges, hindering their success and opportunities for growth. DEI programs also foster an inclusive environment where students from diverse backgrounds feel valued and supported. The absence of spaces such as the LGBTQ Center, Women's Center, and the AACRC would likely lead to feelings of isolation and disconnection for many students. This loss of community would significantly affect student engagement, retention, and overall well-being, particularly for students of color and other marginalized groups. There is a chance that without these opportunities, students would be at a significant disadvantage in securing internships and entering the workforce, which could contribute to inequities in career success, especially for those who lack access to professional networks and resources.

Furthermore, programs like the Turner Scholars and Transitions Mentorship Program help students develop leadership skills, which are essential for taking on leadership roles both on and off campus. If these programs were defunded, fewer students would have the chance to grow as leaders, reducing the diversity of perspectives in leadership positions across the university. The elimination of DEI programs would also have a profound impact on staff in the affected spaces. If funding were cut, staff working in programs such as the AACRC, Women's Center, LGBTQ Center, could face layoffs or job insecurity. These dedicated individuals provide essential support to students and are integral to the success of these programs. The loss of funding would not only diminish the capacity of these centers but would also directly impact the staff who work tirelessly to support students. Additionally,

staff might be required to take on more responsibilities with fewer resources, leading to burnout and a decrease in the quality of support provided to students.

I encourage you all to consider the far-reaching consequences of such a decision and to prioritize the continuation of these programs, which play a vital role in fostering a diverse, inclusive, and supportive campus community.

In conclusion, the DEI programs and spaces at UC have made an indelible impact on my college experience and personal growth. They have allowed me to step into leadership roles, access critical

mentorship, and connect with others in meaningful ways. I strongly believe that the preservation and expansion of these initiatives are crucial for the success and well-being of all students. I urge the Senate to consider the immense value these programs bring to universities and the future of our communities.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Best,

Zoé White

University of Cincinnati Student