

Testimony of Cordaejah Ridley

Before the House Higher Education Committee

Representative Tom Young, Chair

March 10, 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 Cordaejah Ridley, and I am here to urge you to vote NO on Senate Bill 1.

America cannot move forward if it refuses to acknowledge its past. Black history is not separate from American history—it is American history. From the labor that built this nation’s economy to the Civil Rights Movement that reshaped its laws, Black Americans have been central to shaping this country. Yet, bills like SB1 attempt to erase these truths, shielding people from uncomfortable realities instead of fostering accountability.

The Cost of Cultural Ignorance

Cultural ignorance fuels discrimination, division, and systemic inequality. When people lack exposure to diverse histories and identities, they rely on stereotypes and misinformation. Without proper education, these false narratives influence personal interactions and institutional policies, harming marginalized communities.

For example, studies show that job applicants with traditionally Black-sounding names receive fewer callbacks than those with white-sounding names, even with identical qualifications. This bias, reinforced by a lack of cultural education, extends to education and law enforcement, where

Black students are disciplined more harshly and Black men are disproportionately targeted by police. Without confronting these biases, discrimination remains embedded in society.

The Role of Education in Breaking Barriers

Higher education is meant to prepare students for an increasingly diverse world. Cultural studies, diversity training, and inclusive curricula equip students with the knowledge and empathy to navigate this world respectfully. Removing these programs erases important histories and weakens our ability to build a more just society.

Black history is essential to understanding America's past and present. From slavery and segregation to redlining and mass incarceration, systemic racism has shaped policies that continue to affect Black communities today. Instead of silencing these discussions, we should be using education to learn from them and create a better future.

Why SB1 Must Be Opposed

By restricting discussions on race, culture, and systemic inequities, SB1 discourages meaningful learning and silences necessary conversations. Education should challenge us, broaden our perspectives, and encourage critical thinking—not suppress truths for the sake of comfort.

Erasing Black history and cultural studies does not change the reality of racism or inequality—it only ensures that future generations remain ignorant of the struggles and contributions of marginalized communities. If we truly believe in freedom, justice, and equality, we must reject SB1 and protect the right to learn the full, unfiltered story of America. Black history is American history. A nation that hides from its past cannot build a just future. We must ensure that all students have access to an education that reflects the truth—not just the parts that make us proud,

but the ones that demand accountability. 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.