

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

Thank you for allowing me to testify today. My name is Lydia Garris. I am both a graduate and current employee of the Ohio State University, which is one of the institutions that would be severely impacted by this bill if it passed. I am strongly opposed to SB 1 and its companion bill HB 6.

To begin with, the threat of this bill has already cost several Ohioans their jobs, as universities like OSU sunset entire departments to comply with this bill in advance. Every Ohio representative who votes in support of this bill reveals that, for them, any discussion of creating jobs in Ohio is merely lip service.

Even more troubling is the reason why these jobs have been eliminated— this bill proposes to end all programs and departments associated with diversity, equity, and inclusion. Yet when it comes to defining these terms, which is necessary for guidance in how we are to implement the bill, there are no definitions to be found.

When you fail to define terms like “diversity,” “equity,” and “inclusion,” you ignore the extent of what you are actually banning. To give an example, I can tell you that OSU’s Office of Diversity & Inclusion provided information on their resource page for a local free market that addressed food insecurity challenges faced by students. Now, because of efforts to shut down anything with the language “diversity, equity, or inclusion” in the title, OSU has eliminated one of the avenues hungry students use to find reliable sources for food.

Additionally, many Ohio universities contain offices dedicated to institutional equity. In my experience and research, one of the major functions of these offices is to provide support and resources for students seeking to report sexual harassment or assault. But this bill blindly bans departments and offices associated with the word “equity,” and thus will ban many of the offices dedicated to providing this type of support.

I say all of this to show that banning diversity, equity, and inclusion hurts all students, but even if it did only hurt students of marginalized identities, that would be enough reason to oppose this bill. I wish I had the language to convince supporters of this bill that diversity on our campuses enriches our universities more than anything. Right now you have a choice to not put more active harm into the world. There are people who spend their entire lives working to create scholarships for students, and I am simply asking you to not eliminate several life-changing scholarships with your vote.

I know my words fall short of calling to attention everything that I oppose in this bill— for example, I’ve not yet discussed the contradiction of Senator Cirino’s claim that SB1 “is about the core value that students come first; they are the customers of these institutions,” while the bill itself actually *removes* voting rights from student trustees. Clearly there is much wrong with the bill, which is why there have already been hundreds of testimonies submitted in opposition.

Please remember that each of us standing in opposition today represents an entire community of people that we are connected to. If we care enough to speak out today, how much more will we continue to speak out to those around us? And when we speak, we will be sure to remember the individual names of representatives who vote "yes" on this bill, so that when the time comes for your next election, our communities will be well-informed about your priorities.

I ask you to consider my testimony and vote NO on this destructive bill.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify.