

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 Rachel Feltner. I am a Black, queer, disabled, lifelong Ohioan. I am strongly opposed to SB 1 and its companion bill HB 6.

While reading over SB1, I found it interesting that one of the required readings for the proposed American civic literacy course was the Letter from the Birmingham Jail. While I find it abhorrent for the government to decide how public universities should operate, I found this quirk of the proposed bill interesting. So, let me quote a passage from the letter for you now.

“You deplore the demonstrations taking place in Birmingham. But your statement, I am sorry to say, fails to express a similar concern for the conditions that brought about the demonstrations. I am sure that none of you would want to rest content with the superficial kind of social analysis that deals merely with effects and does not grapple with underlying causes.”

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion initiatives are the direct effect of an unfair world. According to a Brookings analysis, in 2022 “for every \$100 in wealth held by white households, Black households held only \$15.” To use another framework, the Distressed Community Index tracks economic well-being in communities. In Dayton, my hometown, the majority of the communities identified as distressed are the same communities that were historically redlined. Redlining prevented Black families from acquiring bank loans, inhibiting the accumulation of generational wealth. In other words, as a result of decades of discrimination, Black Daytonians currently have less wealth with which to obtain a higher education. Scholarships based on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion are a necessity because of these obvious differences in resources.

President Trump speaks of returning our educational institutions to a merit-based system, yet I would hope that all of you agree that merit-based systems, that fairness, can only be achieved when each participant is provided with equal starting resources. If I gave one person a car and another roller skates and told them to have a race, we would agree that it was not fair. Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion initiatives correct for the disparities inherent in our systems. DEI works to give every student a fair chance.

So, I ask you today to heed the words of Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. I ask you to spend your time and energy not on reacting to corrective initiatives, such as Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, that are necessary in an unfair world but instead give your attention to the underlying causes of such unfairness. Work to make an Ohio where every family and student has the financial resources they need. Work to make an Ohio where Diversity, Equity and Inclusion are not a necessary effect of unfairness.

I ask you to consider my testimony and vote NO on this unfair, harmful bill.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify.

I will now take any questions you may have.