

Opponent Testimony for SB1
House Workforce and Higher Education Committee
Rep. Tom Young, Chair

Submitted via email on March 10, 2025 for the opponent hearing scheduled on March 11, 2025

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Thank you for the opportunity to offer written testimony against SB1. I am a resident of Cincinnati, Ohio, and an assistant professor of psychology at Miami University, where I have taught since Fall 2022. I do not represent Miami University; instead, I am submitting testimony as a private citizen. I write to you in **complete opposition of SB1**. One of my primary concerns, as outlined in this testimony, is the effect SB1 would have on the graduate education of future mental health providers (e.g., psychologists, social workers, counselors) serving Ohioans seeking mental healthcare.

SB1 prohibits any DEI-related trainings and programs, which would directly prevent faculty in mental health graduate programs to train future mental health providers in working with a diverse population of clients. **SB1 does not provide a definition of DEI**, but it does seem to conflate it exclusively to race, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, and gender (lines 625-626). This is simply not a comprehensive nor accurate depiction of DEI. Instead, DEI training, including in the context of mental health graduate training, comprises but is not limited to veterans, people with disabilities, women, older adults, and those living in rural communities.

In Ohio, significant mental health disparities exist among the aforementioned diverse and underrepresented populations. For example, **individuals with disabilities** experience higher rates of mental health conditions and face numerous barriers to accessing healthcare services (see Ohio Disability and Health Partnership website). **Veterans** also experience unique mental health challenges, such as a significantly higher prevalence of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and depression, requiring culturally competent care to address their specific needs (see Ohio Department of Veteran Services website).

SB1 would directly impede the ability to develop and provide culturally competent training to future mental health professionals in the state of Ohio. As a licensed psychologist in Ohio who trains future clinical psychologists at Miami University, SB1 would prevent me from teaching and inviting guest speakers to conduct trainings on these topics, given that these fall under the umbrella of DEI. Most importantly, such bans as a result of this bill would further exacerbate the already existing mental health disparities among these diverse populations, limit access to diversity-informed mental health services for such clients, and could reduce the number of licensed mental health providers in Ohio due to those pursuing careers in mental health professions seeking graduate training in other states.

In conclusion, the proposed ban on DEI training in **SB1 poses a significant threat to the quality of mental health care in Ohio**. I urge you to **oppose SB1** to ensure that our educational institutions can continue to prepare mental health professionals to work with diverse clients in our state who are deserving of the most inclusive and equitable care.

Sincerely,



Zachary Soulliard, PhD