

My name is Olivia Riggs. I am a current 1L at the University of Cincinnati College of Law, and I am writing to express my deep concern regarding the potential impact of Ohio Senate Bill 1 (SB 1) on programs, academics, and students at our university.

As a first-generation student who is also a black woman and a part of the LGBTQ Community, I know firsthand how vital DEI initiatives are in creating a supportive and inclusive learning environment. These programs help students like me navigate the challenges of higher education, build community, and access critical resources. By banning DEI initiatives, this bill clearly conveys that Ohio does not value diversity or equal opportunity. It tells marginalized students that we are not welcome, which will only make it harder for our universities to recruit and retain talent. If we genuinely want Ohio's higher education system to thrive, we must embrace inclusivity, not erase it. I ask this committee to reject Senate Bill 1 and stand up for all students.

This bill will fundamentally restrict and virtually destroy my dream of getting a Ph. D in African American history, making me have to seek higher education elsewhere. It will also defund the LGBTQ Center, the AACRC (African American Cultural Resource Center), EPS (Ethnic Programs & Services), and the Women's Center at the University of Cincinnati. All centers and programs have not only been an integral part of my collegiate and legal career but have also helped so many students of multiple races, ethnicities, and sexualities.

If Ohio were to pass the bill, Ohio would be taking themselves off the competitive market with schools and universities who are actively trying to keep DEI initiatives, would lose qualified professors who would be afraid to work in Ohio universities, see a decline in scholarships opportunities and programs that highlight diversity and will start to see a decrease in Ohio children and students going to Ohio universities. But I often wonder if that is the goal. Is that the goal to only have white, Christian, and rich people and students be able to go to college and have their voices heard? This bill sounds like an attempt to keep white people from feeling uncomfortable about the systems they have created.

I believe this bill was created not only to silence the groups of people who have been disproportionately barred from being in higher education but also to fuel the national agenda of Project 2025. If the Ohio House really cared about education, they would be fighting back against the federal government and focusing on more issues like sex trafficking, homelessness, and food insecurity, which plague our communities as we speak.

I came to college excited to engage with new ideas, challenge my perspectives, and become a more well-rounded person. However, this bill imposes unnecessary regulations that will stifle free thought in the classroom. By discouraging discussions about so-called "controversial" topics, this bill tells professors that they must censor their lessons out of fear of political retaliation. How am I supposed to become an informed and engaged citizen if my education is being policed by politicians rather than experts in their fields? College should be a

place of discovery, where students learn to think critically, not just memorize approved information. I urge you to reject this bill and protect the integrity of higher education in Ohio.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Olivia Merie Riggs". The script is fluid and cursive, with the first letters of each name being capitalized and prominent.

Olivia Merie Riggs

1<sup>st</sup> Law Student at the University of Cincinnati

BLSA member, Student Ambassador, The Nathaniel R. Jones Center for Race, Gender, and Social Justice Fellow