

Opponent Testimony for SB1
Dinithi Fernando
March 10, 2025

Chair Young, Vice Chair Ritter, Ranking Member Piccolantonio, and members of the Ohio House Higher Education Committee, thank you for allowing me to provide written testimony against SB 1.

My name is Dinithi Fernando, and I am a third year Acting student at the University of Cincinnati. I am testifying today to express my strong opposition to Senate Bill 1. One of the main reasons I decided to attend the University of Cincinnati was because the university was much more diverse than where I grew up. Living in an area that had more diversity and had DEI education made me feel safe. I use the word 'safe' rather than included, accepted, or cared for because this is really a safety issue.

When the bathroom signs changed at the University of Cincinnati, I really started to wonder what would happen to a transgender woman if she was forced to go to a restroom labeled as biological male. According to UCLA's Williams Institute School of Law, transgender people are "four times more likely than cisgender people to be victims of a violent crime". Changing the bathroom signs could not have been a decision that aided transgender students' safety, and as a cisgendered woman, I don't think it aided my safety either. I do not fear for my safety if a transgender woman is in my restroom, if anything, I am more afraid of cisgendered men in general. Some people's idea of transgender people is a stereotype, and these stereotypes are something that would be reinforced if DEI education was banned, which would make campus more unsafe for transgender individuals.

In addition to negatively impacting transgender students, other groups of people would be affected as well. People of color and women would feel unsafe because education on how to treat them equitably is being erased. Their affinity spaces and resources including The Women's Center and the African American Cultural and Resource Center may be heavily affected, and these spaces keep these students safe by educating everyone on the history in this country and providing resources to these students. DEI words being taken away is negatively affecting students' freedom of speech, and people are being silenced because of it. In addition to these issues, students who have DEI scholarships may not be able to pay for school, students who have already been studying DEI topics will lose their degrees, and again, we may lose knowledge we have already learned from history and make the same mistakes.

In addition to a loss of safety and knowledge, there would be financial repercussions as well. Students who cannot return due to loss of scholarships may not pay anything at all and may drop out. Students who no longer have their major here may transfer and spend their money at a different institution, and students who disagree strongly with what is happening here may do the same.

Overall, Senate Bill 1 would have a large, negative impact on the safety of students, enrollment at the University of Cincinnati, and finances at the University of Cincinnati. At the end of the day, how much money are you willing to lose? Will losing that money be worth it? How can people learn when they don't feel safe? Please consider the student voice, protect your students, protect the finances, and vote NO on Senate Bill 1.

