

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

My name is Jessie Hudgens, and I am a political science and international affairs student at the University of Cincinnati's School of Public and International Affairs. I am writing to express my strong opposition to Senate Bill 1 because of the catastrophic effect this bill will have on Ohio universities being accessible to students from a diverse range of backgrounds, as well as its harmful impact on higher education in Ohio, including its effects on students, faculty, and the long-term value of our degrees.

As a fifth-generation Ohioan, I have personally witnessed the transformative impact of DEI policies on our institutions. The equitable initiative on UC's part to create a nursing program for women in 1889 enabled my grandmother to create generational wealth for our family. UC's desegregation and commitment to expanding higher education opportunities allowed my father to attend the University of Cincinnati, where he met my mother.

The elimination of demographic-specific, or DEI scholarships, does not only affect students of color, who, despite their skill level, are too often overlooked. It also robs Ohio's universities of the scholarship and lived experiences of veterans investing in their futures through Ohio's GI Promise, students with disabilities working with UC's special education pathways program, and Appalachian students, who without specific and intentional outreach efforts, would never have known higher education as a feasible option. Instead of enabling brilliant minds to become first-generation college graduates, creating generational wealth in our state, this bill's provisions would make the American dream drastically harder to achieve in Ohio.

The sections on so-called "controversial language" universities' public stances on the listed controversial issues is not only a free speech violation, but also directly undermines the bill's stated goal of encouraging diversity of thought. My political science degree has been the single most intellectually challenging experience of my life. I have witnessed countless professors argue for positions radically different from their own in class debates purely for the sake of making sure that our opinions have been thoroughly thought through. Throughout this process, our discourse has been kept civil and healthy.

If this bill passes, students reading Dr. King's "Letter from a Birmingham Jail" will be forced to treat pro- and anti-civil rights arguments as equally valid, distorting history and ethical reasoning. It would also prohibit the university from challenging climate change denial—despite scientific consensus—or recognizing milestones like the anniversaries of marriage equality in *Loving v. Virginia* and *Obergefell v. Hodges*.

This legislation also threatens the overall value of degrees from Ohio institutions. If faculty leave, programs are eliminated, and academic freedom is restricted, Ohio will become a less desirable place for both students and educators. This could result in a decline in enrollment and retention, making it harder for the state to attract and retain talent.

Finally, as students, we support Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) initiatives because they align with our values—not because we have been indoctrinated by faculty. The University of

Cincinnati already fosters a diversity of thought, and this bill's restrictions undermine that principle.

For these reasons, I urge you to oppose Senate Bill 1. This legislation would harm students, faculty, and Ohio's future as a leader in higher education. I ask that you consider my testimony and vote no on this bill.

Jessica Hudgens

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