

Ben Collopy
SB 1 / HB 6 Opposition Testimony
Ohio House of Representatives
Workforce & Higher Education Committee
Tuesday, March 11th 2025

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

My name is Ben Collopy, and I am a first-year master's student at Ohio University, studying Higher Education and Student Affairs. I'm here today to share my personal views, not representing any of my affiliations. I must admit, I never thought I would find myself testifying before state representatives, but I am grateful for the opportunity to speak to you today.

I stand before you to strongly oppose SB 1/HB 6. This bill is harmful to the core values of higher education itself and the future of our students.

I ask: why does diversity, equity, and inclusion seem so threatening. What are you afraid of? DEI is about ensuring all individuals, regardless of background, feel they belong. Yet, there seems to be a reluctance to acknowledge DEI for what it truly is. Instead of embracing it, some are vilifying the very words: "diversity," "equity," and "inclusion." If you oppose these values, you're essentially supporting exclusion. DEI programs and events are never exclusionary to anyone? Just because they are geared towards specific populations does not mean others are banned. There are plenty of white students who work and hangout in the multicultural center and plenty of men in the women's center etc.

Many opponents of DEI seem to focus primarily on race, but DEI is much broader. It also supports students with disabilities, veterans, LGBTQ+ individuals, and those from rural areas, like the Appalachian community. This bill ignores the broader scope of DEI. But call it like it is, your issue is clearly with students of color and lgbtq students.

Another key issue is academic freedom. Universities are places for free thought and open debate. Students pay thousands of dollars for the right to engage in diverse ideas, and this bill threatens that freedom by limiting what can be discussed. If students disagree with the environment at one institution, that's their own prerogative. If their views aren't popular, that's on them.

Representative Young, you've said in your testimony that this bill is about empowering speech, but in reality, it restricts the very discussions that foster learning and growth. Have you listened to the students? No one on my campus is asking for this bill. It does not align with the priorities of students today and will push many away from higher education in Ohio.

My generation will hold legislators accountable for the decisions made today. We will remember who stood with us when it's time to vote. It may not be tomorrow, but it will come. History will remember and we are all watching.

I urge you to vote no on this bill. Please listen to the voices of those directly affected by it—students, faculty, and staff. Take the time to visit a campus and understand the positive impact of DEI programs. If you do, you might just gain a perspective that challenges your current view. I'd be happy to host you myself.

Thank you for your time and consideration.