



Ohio House Workforce & Higher Education Committee | Testimony in Opposition to SB 1
March 11, 2025

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

Thank you for allowing me to submit written testimony today. My name is Dwayne Steward, I use he/him pronouns and I am the new Executive Director of Equality Ohio. We are a 20-year strong organization providing advocacy and legal support to Ohio's LGBTQ+ community. Our mission is to create lived and legal equality for all Ohioians. I submit this testimony on behalf of Equality Ohio to strongly oppose SB 1 and its companion bill HB 6.

I also submit this testimony as a long time practitioner and expert in the proven theology that supports diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging practices and initiatives. But, if passed into law, this bill would not only undermine years of progress in this area, it would also be bad for business, it would undermine Ohio workers, and it is a clear departure from the conservative values the majority of the Ohio General Assembly espouses.

- Senate Bill 1 would be a major hit to Ohio's economy. If it passes, our state would lose students, professors, tuition dollars, tourism dollars, and countless jobs.
- Senate Bill 1 is the worst attack on workers' rights in over a decade. It guts collective bargaining rights. It removes job protections. It bans striking for full-time staff. It even ends meaningful tenure.
- Senate Bill 1 would be big government deciding how Ohio's public universities are allowed to operate and what they are allowed to teach.

LGBTQ students specifically face unique challenges that can affect their academic performance and mental health. According to the 2021 National School Climate Survey by GLSEN, schools with comprehensive DEI programs report significantly better outcomes for LGBTQ students:



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- Schools with DEI initiatives have 30% fewer instances of homophobic remarks.
- Students in these schools are 20% more likely to feel safe.
- LGBTQ students are 25% less likely to experience depression and anxiety in schools that actively promote inclusion.

DEI programs also play a vital role in supporting LGBTQ faculty and staff. These initiatives promote a workplace culture that values diversity, which can lead to improved job satisfaction and retention. According to a study by The Williams Institute, workplaces with robust DEI policies experience:

- 30% higher job satisfaction among LGBTQ employees.
- 25% reduction in turnover rates.

Such environments enable faculty and staff to perform at their best, contributing to the overall success and reputation of our educational institutions.

Studies have demonstrated that inclusive school environments positively impact academic performance. Research from the University of Texas at Austin found that:

- Students in schools with DEI initiatives score, on average, 15% higher on standardized tests.
- Graduation rates are 10% higher in schools that actively promote diversity and inclusion.

The presence of DEI programs in schools significantly reduces bullying and discrimination. According to the National Center for Education Statistics:

- Schools with DEI programs report a 35% decrease in bullying incidents.
- Discrimination complaints drop by 40% in educational institutions with active DEI policies.



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This bill also doesn't represent the will of the people. Over 1,000 Ohioans submitted testimony against SB 1 in the Senate. Hundreds of those people showed up to testify in-person. Only 14 people sent in supporter testimony — and none of them were public university students. Listen to the people of Ohio.

DEI initiatives are vital for creating safe, inclusive, and supportive environments for all students, faculty, and staff, particularly those who identify as LGBTQ. These programs not only foster a sense of belonging but also contribute to improved academic and professional outcomes.

I urge you to consider the overwhelming evidence supporting the benefits of DEI initiatives and to vote against the proposed anti-DEI bill. Let us work together to ensure that our educational institutions remain places where diversity is celebrated and every individual is valued.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter and thank you for the opportunity to provide opponent testimony. **Equality Ohio urges you to vote NO on this harmful, discriminatory and destructive bill.**