

A Statement in Opposition of Senate Bill 1

11 March 2025

Chairman Young, Vice Chair Ritter, Ranking Member Piccolantonio, and Members of the House Workforce and Higher Education Committee: I want to thank you for the opportunity to testify today in opposition of Senate Bill 1

My name is Sol Rizzato and I work in the skilled trades, for a small family business in rural Licking County. I am extraordinarily proud of our work and the products we manufacture proudly feature the name of the State of Ohio on them. I am operating under the assumption that some in attendance today may wonder why I, as a person in the trades, am here testifying as an individual against a bill relating to higher education?

I am a product of public higher education systems, here in Ohio, and formerly in the States of Oklahoma and Illinois. I have watched my colleagues who are women face environments of immense hostility, and a lack of opportunities. I, myself, have been denied jobs, have been physically attacked on job sites and in my academic institutions, and removed from places of employment, despite having superior credentials, simply because I am a man of transgender experience. I watched in classrooms, as people debated my very existence. In my perspective, a trade that encourages higher education degrees, I have never seen a candidate hired who was not of superior qualification. Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion programs, however, ensured my colleagues who were women, as well as those who were of minoritized populations of every sense, could access the same level of education as everyone else without harassment and added barriers. These programs made sure I could receive my degrees and technical education as well. I still find myself occasionally grieving for the craftsman I could have been without having needed to expend time and energy fighting unnecessary barriers. I grieve for the craftsman I could have been, having spent energy educating others about my very existence due to a lack of exposure to diversity. How I so wish that time and energy could have been used to further hone my technical skills.

The industry I work in is tight-knit, and when referring to business competition, we often say to quote “what is it that we’re scared of? Perhaps it is our own insecurities?” My fellow Ohioans, in my reading of all seventy-six pages of Senate Bill 1, I do not see a document addressing the true needs of Ohio Education, of which I will leave to the education professionals here to speak about. I do, however, identify a document riddled with fear– fear of imagined causes. To many, perhaps, the voices that speak the loudest in your ears, though they may not be recognized, are those of pain, either from yourselves or others, pain of lost opportunities; of dream jobs, a lack of admission to institutions of higher education, and most importantly, the pain of newness and not understanding. As humans, we naturally gravitate to what is easy, verses what is right. It is easy to listen to those incredibly tangible voices, those that are relatable and play to our insecurities, those that we may seek out as evidence to support our deeply internalized fallacies. Pause. Take Time. Challenge them. Challenge yourselves. I like to quote the American Musician Daryl Davis who always said, “Hatred stems from fear and fear comes from the unknown.” Teaching about the realities of diverse peoples can, as stated earlier, make us uncomfortable. But it’s only when we embrace our ability to be uncomfortable, to learn, to empathize, and to stick up for the marginalized, that we conquer hate. Education can and will continue to be our greatest, benevolent weapon. May we be proud to be a state that defies our own insecurities to embrace empathy.

Thank you.
