

Testimony of Mel Searle
Before the House Higher Education Committee
Representative Tom Young, Chair
March 6, 2025

Chair Young, Vice-Chair Ritter, Ranking Member Piccolantonio and members of the Higher Education Committee.

Thank you for allowing me to testify today. My name is Mel Searle. I am a second year undergraduate student at the University of Cincinnati, majoring in Geology with a minor in Women Gender and Sexuality Studies, and an LGBTQ Studies certificate. I am testifying today in solidarity with my fellow students, as a private citizen, to express my strong opposition to Senate Bill 1.

I am a proud product of Akron Public Schools and as a result of the education I received through them, I have always trusted and believed in the educational abilities of the state of Ohio. When I was making my college decisions, I had the opportunity to go out of state. In fact, I was offered double the amount of scholarship money for an out of state institution, yet I made the decision to stay in Ohio. I made this choice because of my faith in the Ohio education system, coupled with the caliber of the geology and women's studies departments and other resources available through the University of Cincinnati.

If this bill passes, those departments' reputations will be tarnished, and thus my degree will begin to hold less value through time. Furthermore, as a geologist, a degree from an institution or a state that grants degrees to students that believe that the Earth is flat because, "as crazy as that concept sounds, the student has every right to believe that," when the concept in question undermines the field and literally defies the laws of physics, means nothing. I am paying \$7000 a semester, and working incredibly hard, to earn a degree that may mean nothing. If Senate Bill 1 passes, thus threatening the value of my degree, I will be transferring out of state, and I know first hand of many other students who would do the same. With this being said, I love Ohio, I love the University of Cincinnati. These places are my home. I do not want to leave, but with the value of an Ohio degree on the line I, and others, do not feel we have a choice.

Were the corruption of the value of my degree not enough, the quality of the LGBTQ and Women's Centers at UC were major contributors to my college decision. These resources ensured that I felt safe on campus, and through the prohibition of departments and offices related to DEI through this bill, they are likely to disappear. Were these resources not available when I made my commitment to my university, I would have made a different decision. These resources enhance the quality of education in the state of Ohio, and to remove them would result in students making the choice to leave the state, as they seek out resources and environments that are more comfortable and supportive of them, thus negatively impacting the state economy.

In conclusion, Representatives, I ask you to consider the following. Is it worth it to you for the reputation of Ohio's education system and the value of its degrees to be lost? Is it worth it to drive students from the state, and thus lose the economic revenue of our tuition? Is it worth it to turn homey campuses into places students do not want to be by removing our safe spaces? I implore you to consider the student voice, protect the value and reputation of Ohio education and vote NO on Senate Bill 1.