

Dear Chair Young, Vice-Chair Ritter, Ranking Member Piccolantonio, and members of the higher education committee,

I am an out of state graduate student at The Ohio State University and I have been living in Columbus for 2 years now. I came to The Ohio State University from Florida because of the top-ranking counselor education master's program that they offer. This program centers social justice and advocacy to its core, which aligns with my values and what I wanted out of my education. Similar master's degree programs in Florida were not able to teach social justice because of laws that were passed just like the Advance Ohio Higher Education Act. I made the decision to go into debt for my education as an out of state student here, instead of receiving a free education in Florida because of these laws. The Advance Ohio Higher Education Act will push highly talented students out of state, just as similar laws pushed me out of my home state.

At The Ohio State University I have had the privilege of learning from professors and working with peers from all different backgrounds. Together we have been educated on subjects such as systemic racism and capitalism, Civil rights, disability rights, LGBTQ+ rights, and many more topics that you are trying to prevent from being spoken about. Being able to discuss the history of our country- the bad and the good- and how these systems are still affecting people in the present day, has made me a better future school counselor. I understand the experiences of others and can be empathetic to what they are going through, because of this vital part of my education.

I am a school counselor intern at Whitehall Yearling High School, a Title 1 school where 100% of the students receive free and reduced lunch, and a majority of the population are minorities. As a white woman, being educated on diversity and equity is so important to be able to effectively serve the population I am working with. Recently, I took a field trip with a group of my students to visit the Capitol building and meet with our representatives. I got to watch the joy in these students' eyes as they saw the beautiful building and learned about the democratic process. We also learned about the Advance Ohio Higher Education Act, and I saw how frustrated the proposal of this bill made them. The next day over 800 citizens gave oppositional testimony, only for the bill to be passed in the Senate. How am I supposed to support my students' belief in the democratic process, that they were so in awe of, when it does not feel like citizen's voices are being listened to? If the Advance Ohio Higher Education Act now passes in the House, how do I explain that to them again, when I cannot even make sense of it myself?

This bill is bigger than a piece of legislation moving through the Capitol. It is the future of Ohio's education and workforce. The passing of this bill will only result in negative consequences, whereas objecting to this bill will allow Ohio's students, and out of state students, to continue excelling in their education and future careers.

Thank you for taking the time to read my testimony. I ask that you take my testimony to heart and vote NO on the Advance Ohio Higher Education Act before it harms the education of Ohioans.

Sincerely,
Sage Albert