

Hanna Engle
Testimony on Ohio Senate Bill 1
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Chairwoman, members of the committee, my name is Hanna Engle, and I am a student at Cincinnati College of Law and attended University of Cincinnati as an undergraduate student. I am deeply concerned about Senate Bill 1 and its impact on my education and future career.

Political science is a fundamental part of society. It is an essential subject that relies upon discussing complex political and social issues. These issues tend to be “controversial” because students have different opinions. This does not mean discussing these topics is a bad thing. Faculty emphasizes that all ideas are welcomed and necessary to have meaningful discussion. This is how we learn as a society. Discussions on climate change, civil rights, and global affairs should not be treated as political landmines but as essential subjects for critical analysis. Just because these issues are hard to talk about does not mean Ohio should prohibit discussion. If the state wants to produce informed citizens who can participate effectively in democracy, we must protect academic freedom, not restrict it.

SB1 also aims to remove Diversity, Equality, and Inclusion (DEI) initiatives from higher education. These programs do not cause discrimination but rather prevent discrimination and provide a forum for free expression of ideas. The Vice Chair wants to promote “diversity of thought” within Ohio universities, but banning Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) initiatives will diminish ‘diverse thought’ and suppress students’ free speech.

I am a student leader that is involved in several organizations at the College of Law that support underrepresented students. Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion has allowed these groups to thrive. These initiatives are open to everyone no matter their background, so all students are affected if these initiatives are banned.

As a disabled law student, I know firsthand how important DEI initiatives are in creating a supportive and inclusive learning environment. These programs allowed me to speak about the challenges of higher education. A person does not need to be able-bodied to be a good lawyer. The resources provided make sure disabled individuals, who meet the standard of a good attorney, have the opportunity to obtain a proper education to reach those goal. By banning DEI initiatives, SB1 sends a clear message, to myself and other Ohioans, that the state does not value diversity or equal opportunity. It demonstrates to marginalized students, like me, that we are not welcomed.

Restricting “controversial” topics is infringing on faculty’s First Amendment right to free speech. This law is dangerously vague because people have different interpretations on what constitutes a “controversial topic.” It is imperative to share different ideas with each other, even if the discussion gets difficult. It has helped me, and others grow as a person and learn new perspectives. I am a native Ohioan. I love Ohio and the education it provided me, but this SB1 will alter a fundamental part of an Ohio education. SB1 will allow the government to restrict public universities’ curriculum, which will deter students from getting their education here. I came to the University of Cincinnati to participate in the marketplace of ideas, the good, bad, and controversial.

Ohioans did not want Senate Bill 83 and proved it by writing in to oppose the functional equivalent to SB1. This committee made the right choice then, it should do the same now. This bill does not represent the goals of Ohioans; vote no on SB1.