
Opponent Testimony on Senate Bill 1

Presented by Kierra Willis

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Chairperson, members of the committee, thank you for allowing me to testify today in opposition to Senate Bill 1. My name is Kierra Willis, and I am a proud student at The Ohio State University. I stand before you not only as a student on the medical route, but as a double-minority—a woman of color—whose future, as well as the future of countless others, is directly threatened by this legislation.

Ohio State became my home not just because of its academic prestige, but because of its commitment to fostering a diverse, vibrant, and intellectually stimulating community. It is a place where students from all backgrounds come together to learn, grow, and challenge each other to become better. The programs and initiatives that cultivate this environment—many of which would be severely weakened or erased by this bill—are what brought me here, and they are what have kept me here.

As the mentor and secretary of the Minority Collegiate Outreach and Support Team (MCOST), I have guided students who, like me, come from backgrounds that historically face systemic barriers to higher education. These students look to Ohio State as a beacon of opportunity—an institution where they are not just tolerated, but embraced, supported, and given the tools to succeed. I fear that with the passage of Senate Bill 1, the very initiatives that made Ohio State an inclusive space will be stripped away, leaving future students without the support that has been so crucial to my success.

Beyond my leadership roles, the courses I have taken have shaped my perspective and my ability to be a compassionate future healthcare provider. One of the most transformative classes I took was *Embodying Gender*, a General Education course in the Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies department. This class was unlike any other in my academic career—not because it required rote memorization or rigorous proofs of knowledge, but because it encouraged discussion, open-mindedness, and mutual respect. We explored complex social issues, challenged biases, and engaged with diverse perspectives. This course, and others like it, foster the kind of critical thinking that is essential for future doctors, lawyers, educators, and policymakers—professionals who must navigate an increasingly diverse world with understanding and empathy.

If we strip higher education of these essential courses and diversity initiatives, what are we left with? A generation of students who are ill-prepared to engage with people who do not share their experiences. A workforce unable to collaborate across cultural and socioeconomic lines. A society where inequities persist simply because we refuse to acknowledge and address them.

The data is clear. Diversity in education leads to stronger problem-solving skills, increased cultural competence, and better outcomes in the workplace. According to the American Council on Education, students who engage in diverse learning environments demonstrate higher levels of civic engagement and are more likely to seek out leadership roles. The Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC) has consistently shown that a diverse medical workforce leads to improved health outcomes for underserved populations. If we fail to provide future professionals with the educational foundation to understand and address these disparities, we are doing a disservice not just to students, but to society as a whole.

Senate Bill 1 does not just threaten programs—it threatens people. It threatens the students who rely on support systems to navigate college. It threatens the faculty whose work and research enhance our understanding of systemic inequities. It threatens the future of Ohio, a state that should be striving for progress, not regression.

Think about the children who still do not understand the differences between Black and white, between privilege and adversity. Think about the professionals of tomorrow who will be tasked with leading an increasingly diverse nation. Without education that fosters understanding, how will they bridge divides? How will they heal, teach, govern, and innovate in a world that requires collaboration across differences?

I urge you to consider the far-reaching consequences of this bill. If we truly want to create a better future, we must invest in an education system that values diversity, fosters inclusion, and prepares students to engage with the world as it is—not as we wish it to be.

Thank you.