

## Testimony against SB 1

I am an employee of the University of Cincinnati and a doctoral student at the University of Cincinnati, but the views I express in this testimony are my own and do not represent the views of the University of Cincinnati.

My name is Keith Lanser, and in my capacity as a tax-paying homeowner and citizen of Ohio, I would like to speak out against SB 1.

My role at the University of Cincinnati was created in response to the “MLK Trash Parties” that occurred on January 17, 1982. On this day, the Sigma Alpha Epsilon chapter at UC held an explicitly racist party that mocked Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., just 14 years after Dr. King’s assassination. This vile party took place on the eve of MLK Day in 1982, the first year Ohio recognized MLK Day as a holiday. Over 100 students attended, all of whom were white. A flyer for the event was published in the 1982 issue of *Cincinnati Magazine* and included the following:

- It referred to the event as a “rebellious celebration” to “honor the life and death of the (great) liberator.”
- It encouraged attendees to wear explicitly racist costumes and bring offensive props to gain admission, including:
  - “A Canceled Welfare Check”
  - “A Pimp”
  - “Painting your face BLACK”
  - “A Stolen Hub Cap”
  - “A Cotton Gin”

This story eventually reached the *New York Times*. In February of 1982, then-President of UC, Harry Winkler, imposed a two-year suspension on SAE and ordered them to devise a plan “to contribute to their awareness of the wrong they have done.” Pi Kappa Alpha allegedly hosted a similar event on January 17, but no punitive action was taken against them.

One of the programs I oversee at UC is the Racial Awareness Program (RAPP), which was created by Linda Bates Parker in the mid-1980s in direct response to the “MLK Trash Parties.” RAPP was designed to be an intergroup dialogue program where students of all races could engage in difficult, important conversations about race. Over time, the program evolved to include discussions on all aspects of identity. Today, RAPP includes a component where students create group projects on issues they care about. Recent examples include:

- A panel discussion on homelessness
- Leadership and career preparation workshops at a local high school
- A community electronic recycling day
- Fundraising for local charities

RAPP has become an award-winning program that has significantly impacted our communities and the state. RAPP alumni have become professors, university administrators, and Cincinnati City Council members. They are Chief Diversity Officers at large corporations and work to offer health care access to vulnerable populations. RAPP was even recognized by the Ohio House of Representatives for its contributions.

If SB 1 is passed, there is a real risk that this vital program could cease to exist. How can we facilitate difficult dialogues about society’s most pressing issues if some will view those discussions on controversial topics as a form of indoctrination? How can our students learn to create inclusive social change if all diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts are banned? How will the next generation address major issues like climate change if we can’t talk about them?

This bill won’t just impact my professional life; it will hurt higher education across the state, making Ohio less competitive. This isn’t rocket science. If we can’t offer programs that help historically excluded students feel a sense of belonging, they will simply study elsewhere. I know this firsthand because one of my RAPP alumni, a former resident of Ohio who happens to be Asian American and gender non-binary, recently chose to pursue a medical doctorate in Michigan instead of Ohio. They

explained to me that they didn't want to pursue a terminal medical degree in a state that actively threatens to ban abortion access and gender-affirming health care. Can Ohio afford to have fewer doctors?

This bill will also cause faculty and staff to leave the state. The cynic in me wonders if some proponents of this bill actually want educators who care about educational equity to leave Ohio. While this might seem like a short-term victory for them, it will have a significant long-term cost: a massive brain drain of talented faculty and staff seeking employment elsewhere. We are already seeing the consequences of such policies in states like Florida. At New College in Sarasota, over 40% of the faculty have resigned. Can Ohio afford a similar brain drain?

This bill will make Ohio significantly less competitive in the marketplace of ideas, benefiting states that prioritize academic freedom, such as Massachusetts and California. This bill is anti-American and anti-academic freedom. I urge our state lawmakers to stand in opposition to this disastrous bill.

Keith Lanser

6479 Rapid Run Road

Cincinnati, OH 45233