

Chair Roegner, Vice Chair Cirino, Ranking Member Ingram, and members of the Senate Higher Education Committee,

Thank you for allowing me to testify today. My name is Laura Wooldridge. I am an Ohio citizen and educator. I serve as a student affairs professional overseeing multicultural programming, and various student services, and as a classroom instructor. Every facet of my work will be directly and detrimentally impacted by this legislation. Passing this bill into law would have detrimental effects on countless students, staff, faculty, the families from which we hail, the communities in which we reside, and the state's economy. I have mentors and colleagues whose entire careers would be dismantled or dissolved along with my own. I have students whose college careers would be made more difficult or impossible. Students who seek out resources like those my team provides to ensure they have the mental, physical, and communal resources they need to succeed. I am strongly opposed to SB 1 and its companion bill HB 6.

In my day-to-day work, I regularly meet students who are struggling financially, mentally, and socially and the work that I do provides them with resources and a network that makes it possible for them to envision a better tomorrow and, ultimately, to graduate. I see students who are getting by on one meal a day, students who face discrimination and harassment in and out of the classroom, and students who are seeking mentors in their fields who understand what they are up against based on a shared background or identity. These students of all races, genders, religions, and abilities come to my office and members of my team because they know we care and that we will do everything we can to help. Students seek out our guidance because we are knowledgeable, helpful, and professional, and because we see them as the individuals that they are with unique needs, concerns, hopes, dreams, and levels of social, political, and monetary capital—something many others and the system often fail to do. As an educator, the tenets of diversity, equity, and inclusion make it possible for me to connect with every student who comes into my path. They allow me to see students as they are and meet them with what they need to learn, grow, and become successful on their own terms. This bill has the potential to dismantle offices and organizations that provide refuge, resources, and support for students of all kinds. Even if student organizations where students find support continue, this bill makes it difficult for staff and faculty to offer them support and mentorship by fostering an environment of fear.

I struggle to believe any of you cannot see the benefit of diversity, equity, and inclusion in practice; in fact, I would bet that you put these principles into your own lives regularly. Any of you who are parents know that your children do not need the exact same things from you, and as good and loving parents, I would imagine that you treat your children as individuals and meet their distinct needs. If you've ever planned or hosted a party and made sure that everyone could eat, enter, maneuver, and sit comfortably, that is what educators and practitioners of diversity, equity, and inclusion do. We make sure that everyone can participate

and we know that eliminating barriers for some of our students improves the lives of all of our students. The education, trainings, and resources this bill seeks to eliminate are the tools that allow campus communities to see our students as individuals and make our spaces a healthy environment for growth and learning for *all* students. These concepts are the foundation on which the entire field of higher education is built and eliminating them would be a failure to Ohio's students and fundamentally worsen the student experience in our state through attacks on students' belonging, institutional trust, and academic freedom. Positive experience and word of mouth are key marketing tools and when students' experience is worsened, many students may go elsewhere for education, and advise others not to come to Ohio for their education. That will result in a loss of funding for universities, dollars for businesses, and tax dollars to name a few.

Beyond the arguments laid out already, the bill itself is hypocritical in its own right. Wherein the bill seeks to eliminate the discussion or instruction of "divisive concepts," the very education it requires could be considered divisive. The required texts, as introduced by the bill include: (1) The entire Constitution of the United States; (2) The entire Declaration of Independence; (3) A minimum of five essays in their entirety from the Federalist Papers. The essays shall be selected by the department chair. (4) The entire Emancipation Proclamation; (5) The entire Gettysburg Address; (6) The entire Letter from Birmingham Jail written by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. It is no stretch of the imagination to predict that any of these texts and their interpretations could be construed as divisive by people of all political and social leanings. The required education laid forth in this piece of legislation demonstrates the absurdity of the legislation and foreshadows the chaos to come should this legislation be enacted. The constriction on academic freedom for students and faculty and the fear of being doxxed, sanctioned, or otherwise penalized for the pursuit of knowledge will create a dearth of professionals that cuts across industries, impacting our economy through a lack of alumni who remain in Ohio, businesses who settle here, and students who attend our institutions. This legislation will be a blow to higher education and industrial success as we know it in the state of Ohio.

I ask you to consider my testimony and vote NO on this dangerous and destructive bill.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify.

Sincerely,

Laura K. Wooldridge

*The views I express here today are my own as an individual and do not reflect the views of the University of Cincinnati*