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

I am writing to express my strong opposition to Senate Bill 1 (SB 1), legislation that threatens the integrity and mission of higher education in Ohio. While I understand and appreciate efforts to improve educational outcomes and ensure merit-based selection in our institutions, SB 1 takes a counterproductive approach that will have far-reaching negative consequences for our state's universities, students, and economy.

Eliminating Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) offices and programs will weaken Ohio's institutions by making them less competitive nationally, as these initiatives help attract top-tier faculty, researchers, and students. Without them, Ohio risks losing talent to states that prioritize inclusivity and innovation. Additionally, prohibiting DEI-related training and discussions will limit faculty members' ability to foster an inclusive learning environment, setting a dangerous precedent that stifles intellectual inquiry and academic freedom. Furthermore, eliminating DEI-related scholarships and support structures will disproportionately impact low-income communities, making higher education less accessible and increasing dropout rates.

Rather than dismantling DEI programs, Ohio should focus on transparent hiring and admissions processes that prioritize academic excellence while ensuring access for all qualified candidates. Investing in evidence-based programs, including first-generation student support services, leadership training, and STEM outreach, can foster student success across all backgrounds. Encouraging open discourse on complex issues, rather than imposing blanket bans, will ensure universities remain spaces for rigorous intellectual debate and growth.

I urge you to reconsider the impact of SB 1 and work toward a solution that strengthens Ohio's higher education system while upholding principles of merit, fairness, and academic excellence. Rather than dismantling programs that foster opportunity, let us focus on creating policies that ensure all students have an equal chance to excel based on their talent and effort. This bill does not accomplish that and in a lot ways, prevents students, staff, and faculty from having a fair chance of succeeding.

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

Sincerely,

*Thomas Dickens*

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