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 Lorraine (Lori) Urogdy Eiler. I am a retired East Cleveland City School teacher and a former Ohio Teacher of the Year (1991). I have received recognition at the national level on several occasions including as NCSS Secondary Social Studies Teacher of the Year. During my tenure as a Social Studies teacher, among other subjects, I taught courses where students received college credit. Based on over four decades in education, I am strongly opposed to SB 1 and its companion bill HB 6.

An alarming aspect of SB1 is its potential to limit discussion on the history of victimization based on identity, which is essential to a well-rounded and accurate education. Understanding historical injustices—whether they relate to race, gender, religion, or other identities—is not about blaming or dividing people; it is about learning from the past to build a more just and informed society. We have all heard the adage, "Those who fail to learn from history are doomed to repeat it." Censorship of certain topics for discussions would deprive students of critical historical knowledge and analytical skills needed to engage thoughtfully with the world around them. Higher education should encourage intellectual curiosity and critical thinking, not suppress difficult but necessary conversations about history, inequality, and systemic challenges that still impact our communities today. I know my own education broadened my understanding in this regard. I know my students over four decades were more empowered as well especially through their college educations. Among other things, we learn to be upstanders rather than bystanders when we see perpetrators victimizing others. My students were nationally recognized through 'Not In Our Town/School" because of their actions that came as a result of such learning. We need educators who are can accurately teach history and have honest conversations around diversity, equity and inclusion. This bill hides behind the guise of safeguarding free speech and students, but it restricts conversations and learning vital for our democracy. If Ohio restricts discussion on systemic discrimination and historical oppression, we will be failing to prepare students for informed civic participation regardless of any mandated civics course.

I am deeply concerned about SB1's proposed elimination of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) initiatives in our state's higher education institutions. DEI initiatives are not about political indoctrination—they are about ensuring that all students, regardless of background, have equal opportunities to succeed. These programs help create inclusive learning environments, improve campus climates, and prepare students to work in diverse professional settings. Eliminating DEI training would send a harmful message that Ohio is not committed to fostering welcoming and equitable institutions. Our universities should be places where all students feel valued and supported, and removing DEI efforts would undermine that mission while also making Ohio less attractive to prospective students, faculty, and

employers who understand that diversity and inclusion results in a better, stronger, smarter society where everyone can excel.

To navigate conversations in diverse settings, educators and students are empowered to do so in a manner that is more civil through DEI training and an honest examination of history—not by eliminating it. In and outside of the classroom, I have witnessed individuals of all identities, become more civil, more inclusive, more compassionate to ALL individuals because of learning that would be eliminated under this proposed legislation. I have also seen individuals of all identities become more positively engaged in our democracy as the result of such learning. The college experience has been instrumental for my former high school students in this regard. But this positive impact is not limited to just my experience or my students' experiences. Studies have shown that DEI programs continue to lead to higher graduation rates and better campus climates. A 2020 study by the Association of American Colleges and Universities found that institutions with strong DEI initiatives saw a 7% increase in retention rates for underrepresented students. Furthermore, as of February 2025, employers including major Ohio-based companies like Proctor & Gamble —have continued to actively promote DEI as central to their operations. Proctor & Gamble emphasizes that equality and inclusion are integral to its business strategy, enhancing its ability to serve a diverse global consumer base and drive market growth. Diversity and inclusion training is essential to workforce readiness and civic engagement. Don't we want that for our state and democracy? Eliminating these programs would not only make Ohio's institutions less welcoming but also make our graduates less empowered for engagement and less competitive in the job market.

Senate Bill 1 threatens the fundamental principles of academic freedom, shared governance, and institutional independence that define our colleges and universities. By imposing new bureaucratic mandates and limiting the ability of faculty and institutions to make decisions based on their expertise, this bill undermines the quality and integrity of higher education in our state. Ohio's universities and community colleges should remain places of open inquiry, critical thinking and professional decision-making—not institutions subject to political control. One of my primary concerns in this regard is faculty autonomy and shared governance. The bill's proposals to alter tenure protections, impose ideological constraints, and mandate rigid curricular based on political priorities, interfere with the ability of educators to provide a high-quality education. Research has consistently shown that academic freedom leads to better student outcomes. According to the American Association of University Professors (AAUP), states that have implemented similar restrictions on tenure and faculty governance have seen declines in faculty retention and recruitment, as well as reduced research output. For example, in Florida, after the passage of restrictions on tenure and academic freedom, the state saw a dramatic increase in faculty departures, including at the University of Florida, where at least a dozen faculty members publicly cited political

interference as their reason for leaving. If Ohio follows this path, we risk losing top-tier educators to states that value academic freedom and shared governance.

In conclusion, Senate Bill 1 and its companion bill HB6 pose a serious threat to the integrity, independence, and effectiveness of higher education in Ohio. By undermining faculty governance, eliminating DEI initiatives and restricting critical discussions on historical injustices, this bill prioritizes political control over academic excellence. Research and real-world examples have shown that policies like these drive away talented educators, weaken institutions' reputations, and ultimately harm students who rely on their education to prepare for an increasingly diverse and competitive workforce, and the civic demands of our democracy. Instead of imposing unnecessary restrictions and bureaucratic oversight, Ohio should be focusing on real solutions—ensuring funding, improving access, and supporting educators who are excellent teachers and experts in their fields.

I urge this committee to vote no and reject SB 1 and its companion bill HB 6. Your no vote will protect the future of higher education in Ohio, our state, our students, and ultimately our dear democracy.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify.