

Opponent Testimony for SB1 and HB6
Senate Higher Education Committee
February 10, 2025

Jaquelynn McGraw, Graduate Teaching Assistant

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

Thank you for allowing me to testify today. My name is Jaquelynn McGraw, and I am an instructor of French in the Greater Cincinnati area. I am strongly opposed to SB 1 and its companion bill HB 6, and I would like to express concern regarding the contradictory and harmful bans regarding Statements of Commitment (pages 20-21), Controversial Beliefs or Policies (pages 21, 24), DEI Bans (pages 22-24, 41, 44), and the Full-Time Faculty Strike Ban (pages 68-69).

Upon becoming a teacher, I quickly realized that this profession is much more than instructing a subject, in my case, French. Although I am tasked with creating meaningful lessons based on state knowledge standards, I also work to incorporate the various backgrounds and needs of the student population that I serve, whether it be cultural, socio-economic, or cognitive. All students are entitled to an education that is equitable and inclusive to them. While teaching the diversity of the francophone world, I also try to incorporate the diversity of the students that I serve. I have had the pleasure of working with students from North and South America, Europe, Asia, and Africa, and I try to give as many chances as possible for them to share their culture with the class, as culture is defined as one of the ACTFL (American Council of Teachers of Foreign Languages) “world readiness standards” that is a part of my curriculum. I have experienced students that seemed reserved, that displayed a full change in demeanor when I incorporated or asked questions about their cultural background, even if it is as simple as including a picture from their country of origin in my presentation slides. DEI is often reduced to an acronym, but the elimination of diversity, equity, and inclusion is what forms an enriched and informed education. Intellectual diversity should not only be protected, but celebrated in classrooms across Ohio, and the country. This ban is also linked to the ban regarding “controversial beliefs or policies” which demonstrates a gross display of censorship, especially when demonstrated in public universities, which directly violates our First Amendment freedoms of Speech. This ban would render most lessons in my course as moot, as there are many instances of “controversial” events in the history of the francophone world. Are we to not report on colonization? Are we not to report on international relations? Are we not to speak of the 50 countries who use French on a regular basis? How am I to teach a language without the diverse culture behind it, whether the historical events are positive or negative? How am I expected to attend my own courses without mentioning the culture of francophone Africa? It would be nearly impossible to perform any research or analysis without mentioning what this bill describes as a “controversial topic”. How are the humanities expected to survive without the study of war, language, climate, politics, immigration, marriage, or abortion?

While I represent my own thoughts, feelings, and ideals, I would like to take a moment to talk about the mission statement of the University of Cincinnati, as listed on their website.

“The University of Cincinnati serves the people of Ohio, the nation, and the world as a premier, public, urban research university dedicated to undergraduate, graduate, and professional education, experience-based learning, and research. We are committed to excellence and diversity in our students, faculty, staff, and all of our activities. We provide an inclusive environment where innovation and freedom of intellectual inquiry flourish. Through scholarship, service, partnerships, and leadership, we create opportunity, develop educated and engaged citizens, enhance the economy and enrich our university, city, state and global community.”

This bill directly contradicts the mission of the University and would harm the diverse student population it serves. The University of Cincinnati prides itself on the diversity of their students, coming from over 130 countries. The abolishment of diversity, equity, and inclusion offices and practices would directly harm the student population, rendering their education to be censored, exclusive, and overall whitewashed. While this bill will still require a “statement of commitment” regarding equality of opportunity, how will there be equality without diversity, equity, or inclusion? These policies are directly in contradiction with each other, and I implore for there to be equality within equity given to students to allow the flourishing of intellectual inquiry.

I am testifying to preserve the intellectual and cultural diversity of students like me. Diversity, equity, and inclusion allow the open discussion of various ideas without the use of propaganda. It is not controversial to allow people to have their own viewpoint. It is not controversial to respect others. It is, however, controversial, as well as detrimental to eliminate the celebration of various viewpoints, cultural awareness, and to censor the First Amendment right of millions.

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

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify.