

Meha's Testimony against the Advance Ohio Higher Education Act
Senate Higher Education Committee
2/10/25

Meha Pandya
Ohio Student

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

Thank you for allowing me to testify today. My name is Meha Pandya (she/her/hers) and I am an Ohio Student. I am also a daughter, a part-time employee at a university, and I reside in Columbus, Ohio. I am here to oppose the Advance Ohio Higher Education Act which omits the inclusion of diversity, equity, inclusion, intellectual diversity, and other concepts within state institutions of higher education.

I would like to address the specific section of the bill that addresses the prohibition of DEI practices within orientation and training courses, existing/establishing DEI offices or departments, using DEI in job descriptions, etc. The prohibition of the existence of DEI within higher education institutions will be extremely detrimental to the education and enlightenment of young adults in Ohio. My most pressing concern is that students will not be aware of the happenings in the nation as they will be highly uninformed about cultures and community awareness. In my life as a current student, I find myself to be educated on the populations that I am surrounded with, because the organizations I am involved in are constantly spreading DEI awareness. This pushes me to not only be a better Ohioan, but rather support and advocate for equity measures for those in my community. As a woman of color, I have encountered detrimental situations that have affected me in numerous ways. With the impact of DEI measures in my community, I feel empowered that those around me are consistently being educated about the impact that things such as racism, inequity, and exclusion can have on Ohio citizens. If this bill were to be approved, I would no longer be confident that our citizens are evolving and being educated on understanding what DEI can do to help those within our community.

When I think about this bill, I struggle to imagine the impact that the abolishment of DEI will have on university students, specifically those who aren't in the minority. Prior to being enrolled in a higher institution, even as a person of color, I was extremely uneducated on the importance of the diverse and inclusive practices of my fellow Ohioans. After joining organizations on campus, I am consistently being provided with information on what is happening in my community and ways to advocate for my rights and others' rights when it matters. Now, I am able to be confident in my daily practices in the way that I support my peers' backgrounds and beliefs without implementing my bias. Furthermore, I have become comfortable with including my ethnicity, background, experiences, and beliefs on job applications as I believe that the person reading it will be supportive and inclusive of who I am today. Therefore, when I imagine this bill being approved, I am pressed to see the impact that it will have on the incoming college students. This new development will no longer breed strong, confident individuals who

are proud of their backgrounds and feel supported in their endeavors. Imagining the notion that students in higher education will no longer be educated on uniting a community builds a knot in my stomach. Knowing that young professionals will no longer be educated on their equal opportunity is painful and aches my heart. I firmly believe that everyone has an equal right in this state, but none of this would be possible without the confidence that is built with DEI education.

As this bill is fighting to pass, I picture the opportunities I have been given today, which result from DEI's power in Ohio. Learning about the true meaning of diversity, equity, and inclusion as it is prevalent in our day-to-day activities is a life-changing experience and allows me to thrive as a student. Being educated on what DEI means has allowed me to embrace and pursue opportunities that I am certain are meant for me. I am no longer backing down from job opportunities, advocating for what I believe in, or simply attending things that aren't meant for me because of the power that DEI has instilled in me. I believe that DEI has pushed me to pursue avenues that I can thrive in; learning about DEI inspires people to believe that they are meant to be in roles that are fit for them. The bill will influence the lives of those who are so important to me, such as my younger cousins who have yet to go through higher education and would no longer have an environment where they feel respected, valued, and empowered to contribute to their unique perspectives. They would sit down to interview with student organizations that no longer value the variety of differences among people, fairness in treatment, and a sense of belonging. As they enter their professional life, they will back down from applying to jobs as they will have never learned to feel confident and empowered in their experiences thus far. It is an already difficult life living as a minority in the state of Ohio, but with the impact and education of diversity, equity, and inclusion, I feel confident that those around me will respect, value, and support my background despite it being different than theirs. If this bill were to be put in place, that same support can no longer be said for many Ohio citizens, which is truly sad.

I am once again informing you to reconsider the Advance Ohio Higher Education Act. I am testifying to spread DEI awareness in young adults to better our community. I ask that you please consider my testimony and vote no for the Advance Ohio Higher Education Act.

Thank you for your time and consideration in reading this testimony. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.