

Chairman, members of the committee, my name is Griffin Wagoner, and I am a law student at the University of Cincinnati College of Law. I am writing on my own behalf to express my strong opposition to Senate Bill 1 as it unfairly targets Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) programs that are vital to furthering current student success, as well as students in the future.

As a first generation law student from Appalachia, who is also a member of the LGBTQ+ community, I know firsthand how important DEI initiatives are in creating a supportive and inclusive learning environment. DEI programs help students like myself in our pursuit for higher education by creating inclusive spaces and learning opportunities, as well as providing essential resources relating to things such as networking, employment opportunities, and diverse academic experiences.

By banning DEI initiatives, Senate Bill 1 clearly expresses that Ohio is a state which does not value diversity or equal opportunity in any aspect. It tells marginalized students that we are not welcome, which will only make it harder for our universities to recruit and retain talent. Had this bill been in place when I was considering higher education institutions, any school in Ohio would immediately have been off my list as I was looking to escape a lack of DEI in my community, not subject myself to more of it. If this bill were to be passed I would do all that I could in my power to discourage other out of state individuals from considering pursuing a higher education at an Ohio academic institution.

Prohibiting educational institutions and employers from allowing diversity statements or other assessments of an individual's political or ideological views in their considerations for an individual's admissions, employment, or promotional pursuits promotes a static and uniform environment in any place. As a student who was applying to graduate programs this past year,

had I not been given the opportunity to submit a statement regarding my own diverse background and experiences, I would not have felt valued or seen. I would have assumed that the institution as a whole were not interested in people like myself, nor in hearing about and learning from the unique perspectives I could provide to an academic and professional setting.

Additionally, in prohibiting academic institutions from providing their faculty and students in proper DEI training, this furthers the view that marginalized communities are not and never will be valued in higher education. Individuals from marginalized groups may not share the same backgrounds, challenges, and upbringings of those individuals who come from traditional backgrounds, and without educators in place who have been adequately educated about DEI they will be unable to form lasting relationships with these students in the classroom.

In classifying diversity, equity, and inclusion as “controversial topics,” this bill will essentially erase a multitude of identities, beliefs, and histories from the classroom in higher education settings. The only thing that this will achieve is silencing specific marginalized groups from sharing their own unique perspectives and backgrounds, furthering the long history of oppression these groups have already experienced. This is the farthest thing from fostering an inclusive and diverse academic environment and experience. If this were to pass then my education, as well as millions of other’s educations, will significantly diminish in value. I urge the committee to listen to the hundreds of voices writing to them today, as well as consider the thousands of voices from individuals they haven’t heard from, both present and future, and think of the ways that this bill will negatively impact and harm their experiences in higher education. I urge you to reject this bill and choose to keep fostering a diverse higher education environment in Ohio.