



HIGHER EDUCATION COMMITTEE

Witness Form

Today's Date 2025-02-10

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Organization Representing: Self

Testifying on Bill Number: SB-1

Testimony: Verbal Written Both Testifying As:

Proponent Opponent Interested Party Are you a Registered Lobbyist?

Yes No

Special Requests: _____

Written testimony is a public record and may be posted on the Ohio Senate's website

I am an Ohio voter and a 27-year member of The Ohio State University Faculty, writing in strong opposition to SB1. I present two key perspectives:

1. Acknowledging Inequities in Society

I believe that inequities exist in our society, and we must actively work to ensure equal opportunities for all citizens. My formative years spent in Venezuela have profoundly shaped my understanding of privilege and potential. As a fair-skinned, English-speaking child in a small village, I was often presumed to excel academically, while my brown-skinned classmates faced systemic barriers that hindered their recognition and success. Many talented students could not achieve their potential due to limited opportunities.

This reality mirrors the experiences of underrepresented minorities in the United States, where biases persist. These individuals must not only overcome societal prejudices but also navigate disparities in access to essential resources. Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) programs were developed to address these disparities and to provide equitable opportunities for all students. While their implementation may be imperfect, it is crucial that we reform these programs rather than criminalize them. Denying the existence of these inequities does not make them disappear; we must confront them head-on.

2. The Dangers of Political Intrusion in Higher Education

My experiences in Venezuela also illustrate the perils of political intrusion into educational institutions. Under Hugo Chavez, universities became targets for ideological control, stifling independent thought and academic freedom. The government's efforts to impose a singular ideology led to a decline in the quality and reputation of higher education, contributing to Venezuela's current status as a failed democracy.

In Ohio, the political landscape shows alarming similarities. The current supermajority in the State House can dismiss opposing viewpoints and undermine the independence of our universities. SB1 threatens to impose political ideologies on institutions of higher learning, ultimately degrading their effectiveness and reputation. This interference will hinder our universities' ability to serve their critical mission of fostering knowledge and innovation, which directly impacts the future of Ohio and its citizens.

While proponents of SB1 argue that DEI programs discriminate against the majority, the truth is that such legislation will exacerbate inequities and diminish opportunities for all. We must prioritize the long-term well-being of Ohioans and protect the integrity of our educational institutions.

In conclusion, I urge you to reject SB1. Its implementation will lead to a less equitable and prosperous future for our state.

Thank you for considering my testimony.

Mark P. Foster