

Testimony in Opposition to Senate Bill 1

Dear Chairman and members of the committee,

My name is Esha Kothari and I am a student at the University of Cincinnati College of Allied Health Sciences. As a graduate student in the Occupational Therapy Doctorate program, I am writing to oppose Senate Bill 1. Senate Bill 1 poses a detrimental impact to the quality and integrity of Ohio's higher education system—an institution that has profoundly shaped my academic journey and career path.

As an Ohio native, I have been fortunate to pursue both my bachelor's degree and my current doctoral program at the University of Cincinnati. I was drawn to UC because of the wealth of opportunities it offers and the enriching academic environment that has shaped my education and career path. The University of Cincinnati serves as an institution and environment that fosters intellectual exploration, inclusivity, and academic freedom.

Senate Bill 1 threatens these very principles by restricting academic freedom, limiting discussions on critical societal issues including but not limited to climate policies, electoral politics, foreign policy, DEI programs, immigration policy, marriage, and abortion. Additionally this bill dismantles diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives that support students from all backgrounds. These measures jeopardize the quality and integrity of Ohio's higher education system, an institution that has not only enriched my education but also prepared me for my future career. Not only does this Bill affect me as an individual but will greatly impact those from marginalized communities, as well as educating students who will advocate for these communities.

As a future health care professional, I am deeply concerned about the Bill's impact on scientific research initiatives and medical education. Limiting the scope of academic inquiry as well as government interference could stifle innovation, hinder progress in addressing health disparities, and ultimately compromise the quality of care we provide to all individuals, particularly marginalized communities. This ultimately harms the well being of all individuals. This bill will limit my educational opportunities and hinder my ability to become the most well-rounded and informed occupational therapist possible. By restricting the exploration of crucial topics related to patient care, accessibility, and inclusivity, it will negatively impact both my future career and the diverse individuals I will serve—including those with disabilities, mental health conditions, and other underserved populations who rely on equitable and evidence-based care.

As a woman, a student, and a person of color, DEI programming has provided me with a sense of belonging and the necessary support to succeed. Without these programs, I fear that I, and many others will lose access to the resources, mentorship, and community that are critical for both academic and professional success. This is not just a personal concern but one that extends to

countless individuals at the University of Cincinnati and beyond, who rely on these initiatives to navigate higher education and enter the workforce as empowered and well-prepared professionals.

By banning DEI initiatives, this bill signals that diversity and equal opportunity are not a priority in Ohio. It sends a discouraging message to marginalized students, making us feel unwelcome and unsupported. This will only hinder our universities' ability to attract and retain talented individuals. If we want Ohio's higher education system to flourish, we must uplift inclusivity rather than eliminate it.

For these reasons, I urge you to oppose Senate Bill 1 and protect the integrity of Ohio's higher education system. The future of our students, our universities, and our communities depends on it.

Thank you for your time and consideration.