

June's Testimony against the Advance Ohio Higher Education Act (Senate Bill 1)
Senate Higher Education Committee
2/10/25

June Powell
Ohio State 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 June Powell, I use she/her pronouns. I am an Ohio State Student and work at our Writing Center and Climbing gym. I'm writing this testimony to express concern for Senate Bill 1 with its prohibitions of DEI with the ideology of free speech. I believe that under the DEI concepts, the mandating of state institution's to not endorse or oppose controversial beliefs and prohibit all types of DEI training, offices, job descriptions, etcetera contradicts the bill's own goal of ensuring academic excellence, free speech, and educational responsibilities. To be clear, I am adamantly opposed to the reforms of this bill as a current Ohio State student who has tried to do the work of *increasing* inclusion and belonging practice.

At Ohio State, I am a Comparative Cultural Studies major. It's a small major that is dedicated to understanding the inner-workings of culture sharing and how difference unites us. Part of this bill states that it will remove majors that are too small, a major like mine. The Comparative Studies department is trying to grow, but because it is built upon the importance of DEI, it will face considerable struggle. In addition, I'm writing an Undergraduate Thesis about a group of people called neopagan Druids, which are also considered a minority religion that will face considerable setback from this bill passing. Finally, this bill would remove every DEI committee for every sorority, fraternity, and organization on campus. As the first ever Director of Inclusion for Student-Alumni Council's now two year old Inclusion and Belonging program, seeing this bill pass and watching everything we've worked so hard for dissipate is not only unjust, but detrimental to Buckeyes everywhere. My friends and family already feel attacked by the threats President Donald Trump is making about them, whether it be against their gender identity, sexual orientation, or race. This bill passing will only increase the threatened and scared feelings of my loved ones and prevent my hard-earned degree from mattering in years to come.

I learned in class about The Combahee River Collective, who argued that "If Black women were free, it would mean that everyone else would have to be free since our freedom would necessitate the destruction of all the systems of oppression" (The Combahee River Collective Statement). By giving into this act, which will be the first of many strikes against values people have fought for. In the bill, it is outlined that Ohio students take an American civic literacy course in which they are forced to read the Constitution, Declaration of Independence, five essays from the Federalist

papers, the Emancipation Proclamation, the Gettysburg Address, and the entire letter from Birmingham Jail by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. When I think about this process overtly against DEI in higher education, I can only begin to wonder what Dr. MLK would think. Students will be forced to read this letter, but are prohibited from learning about DEI in class? How can these two things exist with each other, when they are inherently opposed? In my Columbus community, there is diversity. But, through an acknowledgment that we all come from different backgrounds and hold different belief systems, which is the mindset that America itself is predicated upon, it is essential that we learn through DEI practices an awareness of cultural difference so that we can better interact with one another. As a white girl from the suburbs, I have little to no understanding about what it means to be a part of a minoritized group and how that feels. The only chance I have at being an ally for these people is to be in positions in which I learn about DEI from people affected by oppressive forces. Everyone deserves a chance to share their story, and everyone deserves to listen to these stories.

I am opposed to Senate Bill 1 passing because it will hurt my future, my loved ones, my local Columbus community, and future Ohio State students. Ohio State's own mission and values push for a diverse and engaged student population. In their Diversity and Innovation page, it explicitly states that as Buckeyes, we "Are curious and open to different experiences" and "Recognize everyone's potential to contribute new ideas" (Osu.edu, "Shared Values" page). Passing this bill will be doing a disservice to Ohio State's efforts towards DEI. It will prevent students from wanting to come to my school and will remove Ohio public universities from being a part of the larger conversation of DEI in our society. I ask that you please consider my testimony and vote no to pass Senate Bill 1, specifically focusing on section 3345.0217 and section 3345.454.

Thank you. I'm happy to answer any questions.