

February 6, 2025

To: Chair Roegner, Vice Chair Cirino, Ranking Member Ingram, and members of the Senate Higher Education Committee,

Thank you for allowing me to testify today. My name is Brandi Baker. I am a concerned higher education and workforce professional, DEI workforce professional, and parent. I am strongly opposed to SB 1 and its companion bill HB 6. As a champion and advocate for education, workforce development and diversity, I will speak from each of these intersections of my identity and the impact it will have on the future of education and the workforce in Ohio.

Education & Workforce Professional:

I have worked in education and workforce development for almost 20 years. I have specialized in the recruitment, retention and completion of diverse urban and rural student populations going into diverse sectors of the workforce. Within each sector of workforce development and education training it is necessary to understand who the student is and how to ensure their success by understanding the diverse background of the students I served. This is what makes diversity, equity, inclusion, access and belonging important and valuable in education and workforce.

Weaponizing diversity does not foster a healthy learning environment where you can examine the hard truths of American History and how history had created much of the successes and barriers we see in our society today. Ohio faces many barriers to education and workforce in many sectors including but not limited to: Science, Technology, Engineering, Manufacturing, and Medicine. We also have a shortage in the trades. Many of these barriers exist because of historical policies that created access barriers to those who are coming from diverse backgrounds.

Example Data Workforce & Education in Ohio:

US Physician Workforce Dashboard- [Workforce Studies | AAMC](#)

There is a shortage of Physicians in this nation. The AAMC Projects 86,000 by 2036. This disparity widens when we look at Rural and Urban areas in this country. Access, Retention and Completion is impacted by race, gender and economic status.

In 2023-2024 medical schools across Ohio had an enrollment status of over 4700 students, however graduation in this same year was less than 1200 and even no even a quarter of that number by race (Less than 200 people). According to the 2021 Health Policy Institute of Ohio Dashboard the state is ranked 46 out of 50 states in Health and Life expectancy in infant and maternal mortality, 39 in incarceration, 40 in unemployment, 37 in high school graduation, 36 in child poverty. This is why population health is critical and important to ensuring sufficient training and education on the diversity of the populations we serve. We are in the bottom ranking of all states in the country in many areas of health, education and workforce outcome. In the life cycle a citizen in Ohio from childhood to adulthood we are ranked in the bottom across the country. [2021 HealthValueDashboard FINAL TM.pdf](#)

In this Bill we should not be arguing and weaponizing diversity, but rather using the diversity of the population in Ohio to our advantage to address our most critical issues in education, workforce and healthcare. Within these regions across the country and within the state of Ohio, we see vast diverse racial, ethnic make-ups within the community. This is why population health is critical and important to

ensuring sufficient training and education on the populations we serve. The lack of training, education and addressing bias have caused us to continue to perpetuate harm to our Ohio community.

If we cannot effectively teach, educate and train future physicians, health professionals, and students who work in a global and diverse society, we will continue to face the increasing workforce and economic disparities that will challenge our state for years to come.

Personal Experience

I want to challenge the weaponization of DEI as a form of oppression to the masses. In fact, in my life it has done just the opposite. As a child, I was born and raised in Cleveland, Ohio in a predominately black low-income, working-class neighborhood. I am a first-generation college student who benefited from ACCESS Trio pipeline programs that supported the access and pathway of underserved students in urban and rural areas. I have a wonderful experience going through TRIO at Case Western Reserve University. That program helped me to navigate college and entry into college at Ohio University where I continued the Trio program and participated in other diversity programs to help support me through some of the most complex times of my social identity in my life. From leaving a community that looks like me to moving hours away from home into a community that waved confederate flags, where some people felt comfortable using racial slurs toward me and making me feel unwelcomed. Diversity Offices ensured my belonging, support and success. It was a place where I felt welcomed and where I felt community. It was a place that I learned about cultures that were different from mine. Diversity offices helped to provide students support through advising, student success programs, mentorship to support my pathway to completing my education and accessing workforce opportunities as a minority, women and economically disadvantaged student. Diversity offices helped to connect me with other students who look like me in predominately white institutions who could help me navigate the racism, sexism, classism and many other isms that show up in classrooms across America when you are the “only” in a classroom. Diversity Offices also helped me connect with a diverse group of friends who were white, black, Asian, Hispanic, international, and from other parts of the state and beyond. The McNair Scholars program helped me navigate the process for graduate school, develop research skills and academic readiness for graduate education. This program included first generation, low-income, and urban/Appalachians students.

The benefits of diversity efforts like this, helped to graduate those who have been historically overlooked due to economic status, geography and race. Ohio has 88 counties, and it is extremely segregated by race and class. There are very few mixed income communities by race, gender, education and economics status in this state. When a student transitions into institution of higher education there are systemic economic and racial barriers that impact a students learning and workforce outcomes. This inspired my career pathway into higher ed to work for these same programs and teach various topics on college and career readiness through a diversity lens. The fact is we live and work in a diverse workforce. Even if you are white, you are not a monolith. You are a diverse and multifaceted human being. Education is a place for learning and exploring these various diverse dimensions of who you are, your history and how you will impact and add value to the workforce you go into.

No matter our color, background or zip code, we want our kids to have an education that imparts honesty about who we are, integrity in how we treat others, and courage to do what's right. But the same lawmakers who have denied our classrooms resources and demanded sacrifices of our teachers are now stoking fears about our schools, trying to dictate what teachers say and block kids from learning our shared stories of confronting injustice to build a more perfect union. They push for outdated and inaccurate lessons, redlining the realities of our history in order to justify the harms of our present. What a good teacher knows is we can't just avoid or lie our way through our challenges; we must find age-appropriate ways to tell hard truths about our country's past and present in order to prepare our kids to create a better future and learn how we can work collaboratively to ensure effective innovative solutions. Joining together, we can demand that our schools have the resources to meet every child's needs with well-trained and supported faculty and a curriculum that helps them reckon with and reshape our nation.

I ask you to consider my testimony and vote NO on this harmful, discriminatory and destructive to the successful harmony and social cohesion of our education and workforce system. The passing of this bill will do unreconcilable harm and perpetuate the discriminatory culture that America and Ohio has done historically to our community. [*harmful/extremist/discriminatory/destructive/etc*] bill.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify.

Sincerely,

Brandi Baker