

February 10, 2025

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 Daniel Diaz Nilsson. I am writing as a concerned resident and citizen of Ohio. Additionally, I have worked in higher education as an administrator for over 19 years; the last 10 years have focused on student access, engagement, and success for all Ohioans. My work in education has centered on creating inclusive environments that support all students in achieving their academic and professional goals. I am strongly opposed to Senate Bill 1 (SB 1) and its companion bill, House Bill 6 (HB 6), as they directly threaten the integrity and effectiveness of Ohio's higher education system.

Controversial Beliefs or Policies SB 1's definition of "controversial belief or policy" is dangerously broad and vague, including climate policies, electoral politics, foreign policy, diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) programs, immigration policy, marriage, and abortion. This sweeping definition burdens educators and creates an environment where teaching factual, evidence-based information could be challenged as "controversial."

This provision would severely limit academic freedom and diminish the quality of education in Ohio's institutions. Experts have testified that this legislation could prevent educators from correcting students who deny historical atrocities like the Holocaust. Similarly, medical students and faculty have expressed concerns that this bill would prevent them from addressing the critical differences in health outcomes among various communities, ultimately endangering the lives of our beloved Ohioans.

Furthermore, the requirement for faculty and staff to allow students to "reach their own conclusions" without "indoctrination" raises alarming concerns about academic rigor. Under this legislation, students could provide demonstrably false answers on exams or assignments without academic consequence, as professors might fear retaliation for upholding factual accuracy. Higher education must be a place where critical thinking, research, and evidence-based reasoning are valued—not where political interference dictates the validity of established knowledge.

Additionally, prohibiting institutions from endorsing or opposing "controversial beliefs" while requiring them to respond to any complaint about violations of this provision will create an atmosphere of constant scrutiny and fear. Institutions will be forced to dedicate extensive resources to responding to politically motivated complaints rather than focusing on academic excellence and student success.

DEI Bans SB 1's complete ban on DEI programs, orientations, training, offices, and scholarships will have far-reaching negative impacts. These efforts are not about political indoctrination but about ensuring that all students, regardless of background, have access to equitable opportunities and resources.

For nearly two decades, I have worked with students from diverse backgrounds, helping them navigate college and supporting their academic and career development. Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) programs provide crucial resources for first-generation students, students with disabilities, students of color, veterans, and other underrepresented groups. Eliminating these programs will not erase disparities but exacerbate them, making higher education less accessible and Ohio's workforce less competitive.

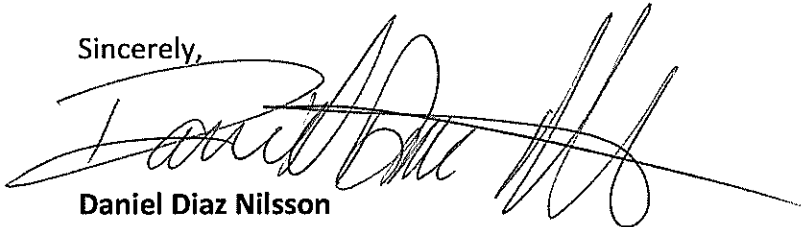
While the bill allows exceptions for institutions to receive grant funding, requiring approval from the chancellor creates an unnecessary bureaucratic hurdle that could limit essential resources for students. Moreover, the mandate for reporting DEI-related spending and imposing disciplinary sanctions on employees engaging in DEI training sends a chilling message: Ohio does not value inclusivity, diversity, or student success.

The Harmful Impact of SB 1 SB 1 is not a bill that strengthens Ohio's higher education system—it weakens it. It silences faculty, restricts student learning, and undermines our institutions' ability to prepare students for an increasingly diverse global workforce. By banning diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives and placing extreme limitations on what can be taught, SB 1 will make Ohio colleges and universities less attractive to prospective students, faculty, and employers.

I urge you to consider the long-term consequences of this legislation and vote **NO** on this harmful bill. Ohio's students deserve an education rooted in facts, academic integrity, and inclusivity. Higher education should empower students with knowledge and critical thinking skills, not stifle learning through politically motivated censorship.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify. I appreciate your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Daniel Diaz Nilsson', written over a horizontal line.

Daniel Diaz Nilsson
Citizen of Ohio