

Members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to voice my opposition to Senate Bill 1. My name is Miranda Stalnaker-Swartz, and I am here in strong opposition to Senate Bill 1. I am writing to you today as both a Master of Social Work student and as a case manager in a high school, where I see firsthand the incredible impact of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) programs on young people.

This bill not only undermines Ohio's public higher education system but also threatens the future of social work education and accreditation. As you may know, the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE), the national accrediting body for social work programs, requires that programs integrate content on diversity, equity, and inclusion into their curricula. If Ohio eliminates DEI initiatives, our universities risk losing their accreditation, meaning that social work students may no longer be eligible for licensure or able to practice in our state. This is not just an education issue, it is a workforce crisis.

Ohio already faces a critical shortage of social workers and mental health professionals. Removing DEI education from universities will make it even harder to train and keep qualified professionals who are prepared to work with diverse communities, including those facing systemic barriers to housing, healthcare, and employment. If this bill passes, our state could see fewer accredited programs, fewer social workers, and ultimately, fewer resources for the vulnerable populations who need them most.

Beyond higher education, I see the direct impact of DEI programs every day in my work with high school students. Many of the young people I work with come from marginalized communities, whether due to race, socioeconomic status, disability, or other factors. DEI initiatives provide students with the support they need to succeed, mentorship programs, college readiness initiatives, and safe spaces where they can express themselves without fear of discrimination. Without these programs, many students will fall through the cracks.

The claim that DEI creates "institutional discrimination" is simply false. DEI programs do not exclude anyone, they ensure that all students, regardless of background, have access to opportunities and resources to succeed. Removing them would not create a more "neutral" environment, it would actively harm students who rely on these supports.

**Furthermore, this bill sends a damaging message to Ohio's educators, students, and future workforce. It tells young people, especially those from historically underrepresented and oppressed communities, that their experiences do not matter. It tells universities that they must choose between meeting national accreditation standards or complying with restrictive state policies. If passed this bill will show that Ohio does not value inclusion.**

Senate Bill 1 is not about academic freedom, it is about silencing discussions on race, gender, and inequality. It will not improve education; it will weaken it. It will not create equal opportunities; it will strip them away. As a social work student, a case manager, and someone dedicated to supporting young people, I urge you to vote NO on this bill.