

Opponent Testimony for Senate Bill 1: Advance Ohio Higher Education Act
Ohio Senate Higher Education Committee
February 7, 2025

Avary Dillon
Private Citizen

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

Thank you for considering my testimony today. My name is Avary Dillon, and I am a fourth-year student at the University of Cincinnati (UC). I am set to graduate in May with a Bachelor of Arts in Environmental Studies and a minor in Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies. My relatives from all over the country will be flying to Ohio to watch the first granddaughter in the family receive a bachelor's degree from an esteemed four-year university. For the past three years, I have served as an executive officer in one of UC's largest student-led environmental clubs, Leaders for Environmental Awareness and Protection, of which I am now President. To support myself through college, I work at a woman-owned and operated small business in downtown Cincinnati, where I educate others on how to save the planet and support their local economy. I am writing today in opposition to the entirety of Senate Bill 1, as a private citizen of Ohio. Though my experience in university has largely shaped me as a person, I am testifying as an individual. In no way do I represent the beliefs of the University of Cincinnati.

I am not native to Ohio. I grew up in Clearwater, Florida, after my Ohio-native dad met my mom on vacation in the Tampa Bay Area. I grew up with a unique appreciation for the ocean, county parks, and our country's natural beauty. In high school, I was an avid participant in beach cleanups and lamented the lack of environmental science courses in my high school. I knew that I wanted to go to college in a different physical environment, to expand my knowledge of natural landscapes and explore varying opportunities. After the COVID-19 pandemic, my family decided to make the move back to my dad's hometown to help my grandfather after the passing of my grandmother. I considered Ohio schools versus Florida schools and chose the University of Cincinnati because of its wonderful Environmental Studies program. Since then, I have watched, and been a part of, the program flourishing and the student body thriving. I have gained invaluable knowledge, for which I will soon have the piece of paper to prove it.

Choosing Ohio was the best choice I could have made. I am proud of my education, and I am proud to be graduating from an Ohio university. My little sister turns 18 next month. Right now,

she is in the throes of deciding which university to attend in the fall. She has received sizable scholarships from out-of-state universities, eager to provide her with incredible opportunities. My parents were advocating to stay in-state, but in the aftermath of SB1, your decision could mean the separation of me and my little sister by hundreds or thousands of miles. To receive the same credible, respectable education that I have received in Ohio, my sister will need to leave the state if this bill becomes law. She is my little sister, and where she goes, I will most likely follow. I have fought to protect her against bullies, her chronic illness, and math homework. I will fight to protect her higher education, too.

I have made lifelong friendships during my time at UC, and in Cincinnati. I have found lifelong mentors and references in faculty members and staff throughout the University as well. Personally, I am a first-generation university student, as I mentioned earlier. My father attended a two-year technical college in the 90s that no longer exists. My mother entered the workforce out of high school. They both dreamt of more for me. My mother instilled in me a love for reading at a young age, taking me on mother-daughter dates to the public library. This quickly flourished into a love for learning. In high school, I would watch videos of university students studying in a stately library to motivate myself to finish my U.S. History homework after a long day of classes and extracurriculars. I even graduated a year early, eager to begin my next chapter. A university education meant developing my critical thinking skills, expansion of perspectives, and an introduction to the way the world works. I was excited to gain skills that would bolster my competitiveness in the workforce, and had even been exploring furthering my education beyond a Bachelor's degree in Ohio. I can confidently say that if this academic censorship bill is passed, I will be leaving to pursue my dreams elsewhere. A state in which education is restricted and debates are stifled is a state I am not proud to endorse, or be a part of. Education should serve all people, not just a select few with a narrow worldview.

Senate Bill 1 will harm students, their families, and the value of their higher education. It pushes an agenda that serves outside, biased interests, not Ohioans' values. The deceitful language is appalling, endorsing diversity by completely cutting it off. I hope you will see how detrimental this bill would be to student lives, the credit of Ohio institutions as a place of acceptance and progress, and the statewide workforce. I urge you to vote NO on Senate Bill 1.

Thank you for considering my testimony.