

Opponent Testimony for Bill 1

Higher Education Committee

02-11-2025

Tess Zagorski, Doctoral Trainee

Wright State University, School of Professional Psychology

Chair Roegner, Vice Chair Cirino, Ranking Member Ingram, and members of the Higher Education committee. Thank you for allowing me to testify today. My name is Tess Zagorski, pronouns she/her, and I am a current second year doctoral student at Wright State University, School of Professional Psychology. I am here to express opposition to Senate Bill 1, and particular concern regarding section 3345.0217.

I am testifying in solidarity with my peers and colleagues who are facing a tremendous set back in their own visibility in education. A large portion of my peers are women, veterans, people of color, people within the disability community, and within the LGBTQ+ community. Further, in recognition of my own privileges as a White middle-class student, I am also testifying in defense of my own education and need for diversity training to best serve my present and future clients as a mental health professional.

In one breath of this piece of legislation you implore higher education to place value on a reduction in bias, and in the next breath you ask higher education to eliminate the conversations through which students can challenge and develop awareness of their own biases. Studies have indicated that regardless of a merit-based system, bias continues to impact the judgement and decision making of those in power.

Further, you ask faculty and staff to allow for students to reach their own conclusions, and to educate students by “means of free, open and rigorous intellectual inquiry to seek the truth”, but then you ask that they prohibit education on diversity and equity. We cannot form a conclusion on an issue we are not allowed to discuss. We cannot receive free and open intellectual inquiry with the imposition of censorship. Without these conversations, clients and patients of future nurses, doctors, and mental health professionals are at risk of misdiagnosis, neglect, medical gaslighting, and being pathologized by professionals with inadequate education on the populations they serve.

Proponents of this bill have suggested its passing will remove politicization in schools across Ohio. Diversity education isn't a political endorsement. It's an endorsement for the furtherment of our capacity for compassion and perspective taking. As Dr. Martin Luther King states in his Birmingham letter, that is also a required reading outlined in this bill, he states that "sometimes a law is just on its face and unjust in its application".

I ask that you consider my testimony, and the negative influence this bill would have on the future of Ohio students and professionals of all walks of life. Those of us in privileged positions will be robbed of the enriching, eye opening and necessary education that diversity learning offers. And those who are within diverse communities, will be robbed of their voices and their protections within an often flawed and bias riddled system. I ask that you please consider my testimony and vote no to Senate Bill 1. As philosopher Matshona Dhliwayo once said, "race and religion do not separate people; ignorance does." Thank you. I'm happy to answer any questions.