

Testimony of Dawn M. Johnson, Ph.D.
February 10, 2025

My name is Dr. Dawn Johnson, and I am a Professor of Psychology at the University of Akron, where I have taught for the last 16 years. I do not represent the University of Akron, but rather am submitting testimony as a private citizen in opposition to Senate Bill 1.

First and foremost, this bill harms students. On a practical level the regulations included in this bill will be incredibly costly. It will require funds to be reallocated to support the policing of faculty to demonstrate adherence to the requirements set forth in Senate Bill 1. This will inevitably reduce available funds to support students and their education. Secondly, DEI (diversity, equity, inclusion) training and programs exist to support students and ensure that students from all identities have equitable access to all educational resources. If this bill is passed, minoritized students will inevitably be harmed. For example, the DEI committee in the department of psychology at the University of Akron surveyed our undergraduate and graduate students. They found that many of our students experienced microaggressions in the classroom. If students do not feel safe in their learning environment they will not excel. The work of our DEI committee and the programs implemented as a result will improve the learning environment for a substantial number of our students. Senate Bill 1 would hinder our ability to maximize learning for ALL our students. Most importantly, by restricting discussions about race, sex, sexuality, and gender identity, students will be unprepared for multicultural, global workplaces that prioritize DEI and critical thinking.

Secondly, this bill will negatively impact enrollment. Nationally, strategies that enhance diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility (DEIA) are valued and emphasized. In fact, just today I received an email from the National Institutes of Health (NIH) announcing a prize competition that will “recognize and reward biomedical and behavioral science institutions that have identified gaps in DEIA and designed, implemented, and evaluated interventions to address them. It also aims to identify effective practices for enhancing DEIA within faculty, postdoctoral scholars, and student bodies that can be feasibility disseminated for adoption by other institutions.” A focus on DEI is a national imperative. Institutions in states that pass legislation like SB1 will inevitably be valued less than similar institutions in other states where such legislation does not exist. Students from minoritized and historically oppressed identities will most definitely choose other institutions that will enhance their learning environment, as opposed to public institutions in Ohio where their learning is restricted. As a result, enrollment will drop, and the diversity of the student body will be negatively impacted. If enrollment numbers drop substantially, some institutions might not survive. I serve as a core faculty in the University of Akron’s American Psychological Association (APA) Accredited Doctoral Program Counseling Psychology. This is a prestigious program described as one that “offers outstanding doctoral preparation in counseling psychology and provides an excellent blending of both science and practice,” in our most recent APA site visit required as part of our accreditation process. A commitment to multiculturalism, diversity, and social justice is a core value of Counseling Psychology and something we are required to demonstrate to maintain our accreditation. Even if the accreditation requirements supersede the restrictions dictated by this bill, if Senate Bill 1 passes, it will inevitably impact on our ability to recruit and retain high-quality and diverse graduate students for our program. Why would someone want to study counseling psychology in a state that clearly de-values something that is uniquely tied to the discipline of

counseling psychology. In fact, applicants are already asking about such legislation and clearly consider this when making decisions about graduate programs. I am certain that our doctoral program will significantly suffer if this legislation is passed. In fact, I fear that our program will crumble if SB1 is passed.

Third, this bill will certainly reduce the quality of faculty in state funded universities in Ohio. This bill dictates what and how faculty can teach. It attacks academic freedom, tenure, and students' freedom to learn. It requires administration to police faculty and assures that they do not veer from the regulations set forth in this bill. It takes away employee's right to strike which is guaranteed to us by the National Labor Relations Act. Faculty will choose to work in settings where their rights to challenge unfair labor practices are not restricted. Additionally, by restricting DEI initiatives and programs, as well as limiting discussions about race, sex, sexuality, and gender identity, this SB1 severely limits our ability as faculty to teach students to think critically. While the language in this bill suggests that the purpose is to provide a fair and unbiased education; the reality is that it dictates what faculty can and cannot teach – obstructing faculty's academic freedom. \ Thus, as faculty retire or choose to leave because of the mandates dictated by SB1, the quantity and quality of faculty in Ohio universities will surely suffer. In turn, graduate programs will be harmed, as students will choose programs in universities with higher quality and externally funded faculty that are better equipped to prepare them for global workplaces that prioritize DEI and critical thinking.

In summary, this bill is incredibly harmful, and I am strongly in opposition to Senate Bill 1. In fact, if this bill were to pass, I would seriously consider leaving the University of Akron and moving from the state of Ohio. Ohio has been my home for 20 years. I attended Denison University for my undergraduate education. I want to see Ohio thrive. This legislation will put Ohio at a significant disadvantage. It will cause irreparable harm to Ohio universities and the students they aim to serve. But most importantly, it will squash students' ability to think critically in a safe and affirming learning environment. As such, I ask that you vote NO to Senate Bill 1.