

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 Eunique Avery. I am a lifelong Ohio resident, born and raised in this state. I am a former foster care youth, a product of public schools (PK-12), and a current PhD student. I am strongly opposed to SB 1 and its companion bill, HB 6. As mentioned above, I am a former foster youth and a first-generation college graduate. My life story has been far from "easy." I have overcome many trials, tribulations, and setbacks—many of which stemmed from my experiences in educational spaces. As a child, I was often mislabeled and mismanaged by teachers and administrators who did not look like me. In school, I never read stories about little Black girls or powerful Black women. Yet, as a lover of learning and someone determined to build a successful future, I persevered through K-12 education and pursued higher education.

When I was blessed with the opportunity to attend a public university for my bachelor's degree, I enrolled in an Africana Studies course that changed my life. Learning about my history made me more confident as a scholar and connected me to a part of my ancestry that had never been introduced to me in school. I went on to earn my master's degree and am currently pursuing a doctorate. When I look back over my life, education saved me. It allowed me to rediscover who I am and where I come from—something invaluable to a child who did not grow up with access to their biological family's history. Education provided me with opportunities to engage in cultural student organizations, build community, and enjoy my educational journey alongside a diverse group of students.

That is why I oppose this bill. Supporters of these bills focus solely on negative assumptions about what DEI brings to educational environments. My testimony proves those assumptions wrong. DEI is not a curse word or a stain causing division in this country—it is what gives birth to people like me, who grow up in environments beyond their control but learn that those environments do not define them. DEI fosters innovation in our state and country. This bill's attempt to silence the student body at OSU is another significant reason I oppose it. Supporters claim they want school environments to feel welcoming to all, yet they seek to censor, devalue, and discredit the voices of young future leaders. This bill is dangerous to our state and the future of education. As other states continue to attract high school graduates, Ohio should focus on retaining and recruiting young leaders. Some cities in Ohio have seen an increase in young adults choosing to make Ohio their home. However, I fear that policies like this will drive young adults, like myself, to leave Ohio and pursue educational and career opportunities elsewhere.

I was born and raised in Ohio, educated here, and have built my early career here. I want to stay and contribute to my community. However, this bill has made me question whether the Ohio Senate has forgotten and neglected the interests and desires of its growing population. By continuing to back outdated, harmful, and unjust policies, they risk negatively impacting us all.

I ask you to consider my testimony and vote NO on this extremist and destructive bill.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify.

Eunique Avery