

**Opponent Testimony for
SB1
“Enact Advance Ohio Higher Education Act”
Senate Higher Education Committee**

[February 7th, 2025]

**[James Rollman, Student]
[Citizen of Ohio]**

To the respectable Chair Roegner, Vice Chair Cirino, Ranking Member Ingram, and further members of the Higher Education Committee,

Thank you for this opportunity to testify today, and thank you for any consideration of my words going forward. My name is James Daniel Rollman. I was born in Ohio District 32, but currently I'm pursuing my education and living in the 28th District for the Ohio Senate. I've lived in Ohio all of my life, and I've been proud of our great state's history as a spearhead into the future. From when my family migrated to the Northwest Territory from New Jersey, to our acceptance of Black Americans during the Great Migration, to our open arms to other immigrant groups from within the states to out of them. Lady Liberty may sit in the New York Harbor, but her light has always shone bright on our humble shores of Lake Erie. We were the second state in the country to fight for Women's Suffrage at Salem, Ohio in 1850. We refused to submit and sacrifice our citizens to slave catchers and my ancestors fought and died for the Union in the Civil War. As a vital swing state, I looked with starry eyes as a child that our Ohio stood as a bastion in a storm that looked out with a cool head. We prioritized our education—we didn't slash it and we sure didn't bend to the will of the Federal Government every time they came knocking. The language and demands of this bill are unOhioian. unAmerican. And unConstitutional. We must hold the belief that we are strong people as Ohioans, but I cannot hold my head high here—for the steps are far too slippery. I cannot only ask, nor can I beg. I must beseech you all to consider my words as a constituent, and oppose the Enact Advance Ohio Higher Education Act during your deliberation.

One of our greatest prides as Americans was our status as being The Great American Melting Pot as we have etched in our Lady Liberty herself, “Give me your tired, your poor, Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free.” We find strength through unity, and diversity. Ecclesiastes 4:9-12 speaks of our strength together. “Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves.” Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion programs— despite their recent scorn— build better, more human communities within Higher Education. To seek their demise would be a great folly. I'm from Ashtabula country, the largest and one of the poorest counties in the state. Without the phenomenal outreach programs from The University of Akron, I would have never

been aware of the opportunities and ability to afford higher education. Such programs fall into the umbrella of D.E.I., as I am considered underrepresented.

Within my community, The University of Akron holds a strong position at its heart. The campus fosters a strong community of “Zips” with spaces for all of its students no matter their background or differences. The ability to retain these spaces is not only dependent on non-limiting policies such as SB1, but also our professors and full-time employers' right to protest and strike. Student organizations and colleges have often been bastions against regimes and political malintent, often serving as a core for positive change. Placing harsh limits on the universities of Ohio in their rights to protest, and adding punitive fines or withdrawals of funding is a step into the lane of authoritarians. The group pushing this envelope often aspires to make America great again, and often idolizes the nostalgic glory days such as the strength of the U.S. during the space race. Challenging and limiting pillars of education seems to be a stark difference of anti-intellectualism that was uncharacteristic of the “glory days” of the United States. SB1 would seek to strip the resources, spaces, and rights of many in a manner that will ultimately be reversed. Progress is hardly ever stopped for long, especially when the majority of the world looks at our late actions with scorn.

I write today for fear of what these regulations mean on the autonomy and individuality of universities within our state. I write today for fear of what it means to remove a full-time state employee's right to protest and strike. I write in fear today about what it means to regulate “DEI” programs and how they’re going to harm our community and destroy the resources that they provide. I write in fear of what this bill could provide as a stepping stone, and for fear that we are losing progress not just as a state but as a society. The misled crusade against DEI introduces a dangerous narrative and reductionist culture for women and people of color within our schools and our workplaces. I write in fear of the barment of education topics that lead to the fragmentation of other topics. Key topics that will generate good, knowledgeable doctors and kind social workers. I write in fear of the fear mongering of Chinese influence and what it means to bar universities from accepting aid from China and its stark similarities to the Red Scares. I do not believe that SB1 acts in good faith of myself as a constituent, nor does it serve our community in any way that is healthy. I ask that you please consider my testimony, and vote no to the continuance of SB1.

Thank you, and I am happy to answer any questions that you may have.