

Jenna's Testimony against the Advance Ohio Higher Education Act
Senate Higher Education Committee
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Jenna Biedenharn
Ohio Student

Thank you for allowing me to testify in opposition today. My name is Jenna Biedenharn (she/her/hers). I have been thinking about this Bill and the impacts that it will have on everyone. Whether you like it or not, it will affect each and every single person in Ohio. I believe this legislation threatens the core values of academic freedom, institutional autonomy, and diversity in Ohio's higher education system.

The Advance Ohio Higher Education Act proposes the elimination of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) programs within Ohio's public higher education institutions. DEI initiatives often encompass support services for students with disabilities, aiming to create accessible and inclusive learning environments. By dismantling these programs, the Act could inadvertently reduce essential resources and accommodations that facilitate the academic success of students with disabilities. One significant consequence is the potential removal of extended time on tests and exams for students with documented disabilities, a fundamental right under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Without these accommodations, students with learning disabilities, ADHD, or other challenges may face significant disadvantages, making it harder for them to compete academically. This rollback of support not only undermines accessibility but also contradicts the principles of equal opportunity in education. By stripping away these inclusive measures, the bill creates unnecessary barriers that could harm student success and retention in Ohio's higher education institutions, and potentially hinder their educational attainment and overall campus experience. I work with kids with developmental disabilities and it breaks my heart to know that their future successes could be dimmed by the ignorance of this bill.

This bill introduces measures that could restrict faculty members' ability to engage in open inquiry and teach controversial topics, ultimately weakening Ohio's reputation for academic excellence. Higher education thrives on the free exchange of ideas, yet this proposal risks chilling critical discussions and discouraging top educators and researchers from choosing Ohio institutions. Furthermore, by imposing additional oversight and potential bureaucratic constraints, the bill could hinder universities' ability to adapt to evolving educational and workforce needs. Additionally, provisions that impact tenure and governance could make Ohio's colleges and universities less competitive in attracting and retaining high-quality faculty. Strong, independent institutions are essential for driving innovation and economic growth, and any effort to undermine them would be detrimental to the state's long-term prosperity.

For these reasons, I urge the committee to oppose the Advance Ohio Higher Education Act and instead focus on policies that promote academic excellence, institutional flexibility, and student success. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Thank you. I am happy to answer any question.

