

Chair Roegner and members of the Senate Higher Education Committee,

My name is Laura Watson, I am a mother, nurse and graduate of The Ohio State University. I am testifying in opposition to Senate Bill 1 because it threatens the integrity of higher education by undermining the fundamental principles of academic freedom, inclusion, and critical thinking that are essential to a thriving democracy.

As a parent, I want my children to receive the best education possible, one that prepares them to engage in meaningful discourse and navigate an increasingly diverse world. This bill seeks to inject political oversight into university curriculums, stripping institutions of their ability to provide a robust education. It also limits the ability of faculty to foster open discussions in the classroom by imposing vague restrictions on teaching unidentified "controversial" topics. Moreover, the removal of collective bargaining rights for faculty members could destabilize our universities, making it harder to attract and retain quality educators.

The removal of DEI initiatives, which have been instrumental in supporting students from different backgrounds, risks alienating students from underrepresented communities, discouraging them from attending our state's institutions. I myself was a DEI admittance to OSU as a female from an Appalachian county. This bill's attack on DEI programs is not just an attack on higher education—it is an attack on the values of fairness and opportunity that should define our state.

Additionally, threatening university funding based on ideological standards is a blatant attempt to force institutions into political submission. This is not how we build a strong, inclusive, and forward-thinking Ohio. I implore this committee to listen to the voices of students, educators, and community members and to reject this piece of legislation. We want Ohio to be a place where all children can receive top-tier higher education and find meaningful careers, but this bill jeopardizes that possibility. Please vote against Senate Bill 1.