

Testimony of Shelby Dotson
Before the Senate Higher Education Committee
Senator Kristina D. Roegner, Chair
February 10, 2025

Chair Roegner, Vice-Chair Cirino, Ranking Member Ingram and members of the Higher Education Committee.

My name is Shelby Dotson. The following statements are my own and do not represent any other persons or institutions. I am writing to you today as a concerned citizen, a college student, and a lifelong resident of the state of Ohio to urge you to vote no on SB 1. This bill would be detrimental to not only our teachers and educational system, but also the health and well-being of our students.

I am appalled as a member of the scientific community that this committee is entertaining the idea that rigorously tested research on subject matter such as climate change, facts of reproductive health, and LGBTQ+ studies being “controversial” in nature means that it must be placed in the same league as prejudiced opinions that directly contradict all known scientific evidence. This is dangerous rhetoric and would set a worrying precedent for the future of education. A topic being controversial in public and political theatre does not mean that the conclusions the scientific evidence points to are incorrect; it means that there is a serious epidemic of anti-intellectualism, bias, and prejudice amongst those who assert their opinions as fact when they cannot provide basis for them outside of their own bigotry or private interests.

Climate change, for instance, is a phenomenon that has been studied since the late 19th century. It is an undeniable fact that our Earth has been heating at an accelerated rate since the dawn of the industrial revolution. It is an undeniable fact that we are seeing the ramifications of excess greenhouse gases, pollution, and habitat loss on our natural environment. It is an undeniable fact that these are issues that future generations will have to contend with in order to create a sustainable world. Does this government body truly believe that ignoring these realities, no matter how harsh they may be, will prepare our young generations for the future they will inherit?

I chose to become an environmental scientist because I truly care about the well-being of this planet as well as each and every person that lives on it. I was inspired by the beauty of our state and all of the people who work to preserve it. I am thankful for the teachers I had that did not sugarcoat the issues we grapple with as a society. Refusing to teach the truth about subjects like climate change, reproductive health, and civil rights would undercut our students’ ability to reason, think critically, and problem solve, which would obfuscate their understanding of the world at large.

I am equally disgusted by the way that this bill feigns concern by prohibiting segregation and discrimination on the basis of race, ethnicity, religion, disability status, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression, while simultaneously banning the

discussion and enactment of “DEI” policies. How can this body support the former, but not the latter? Any member who supports the banning of diversity, equity, and inclusion should specifically articulate what exactly it is about diversity, equity, and inclusion that they oppose, because the absence of those attributes is homogeneity, injustice, and exclusion.

For instance, it is DEI policies that provide disabled students with the IEPs, aides, and accommodations that allow them to successfully participate in education. Many of these students would not reach graduation without these supports. I for one am a student who received educational accommodations for stressful life changes during my senior year in high school. I struggle to rationalize how removing support infrastructures for our most vulnerable students would allow them to thrive.

I urge this committee to make the right choice and vote NO on Senate Bill 1, in addition to all other legislation that wages war against our BIPOC, LGBTQ+, disabled, or otherwise marginalized communities. Diversity is the great strength of our nation; not a weakness. I also call upon this legislature to call junk science for what it is: junk. Do not discredit reputable science, the same science that has paved the way for the advancement of our collective civilization, by allowing it to be tainted by personal prejudice. Thank you.