

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 Ambika Sood. I am an alumna of the University of Toledo and a future public health graduate student. My career goals include becoming a professor and researcher of public health with an emphasis on the sociological side of medicine. I want to add that I am testifying as a private citizen of Ohio and not on behalf of any organization or institution. I am strongly opposed to SB 1 and its companion bill HB 6.

As a former medical student, I witnessed firsthand the critical importance of diversity, inclusion, and equity education in medical and public health training. My experience with the elective course "Medical Racism and Systemic Health Inequities" revealed the profound impact of understanding medicine's complex historical context and its ongoing implications for patient care.

During my first year of medical school, this course provided a deep exploration of how historical medical practices have shaped current healthcare disparities. We critically examined systemic inequities, learned advocacy strategies, and developed a nuanced understanding of how historical biases continue to influence medical treatment and research.

The following year, I was privileged to co-facilitate this course, which allowed me to transition from student to educator. This dual perspective reinforced my conviction that such educational initiatives are not merely academic exercises but essential tools for creating more compassionate, equitable healthcare systems.

Senate Bill 1 threatens to dismantle precisely these kinds of crucial educational efforts. By attempting to prohibit training that addresses racism and systemic inequities, the bill would severely handicap future healthcare professionals' ability to:

- Recognize and mitigate unconscious biases
- Provide culturally competent care
- Understand the historical roots of current health disparities
- Develop research methodologies that account for systemic inequities
- Advocate effectively for marginalized patient populations

For healthcare workers, this knowledge is not optional—it is fundamental to delivering ethical, comprehensive medical care. Understanding the historical and systemic contexts of healthcare directly impacts patient outcomes, research integrity, and the overall quality of medical treatment.

The proposed legislation would not just limit education; it would actively harm our healthcare system by preventing critical conversations about equity, representation, and systemic change. Future medical professionals must be equipped with comprehensive knowledge that allows them to serve all patients with understanding, respect, and excellence.

The ramifications of eliminating diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives extend far beyond medical education, threatening the foundational principles of academic excellence and societal progress. By restricting these critical educational approaches, Senate Bill 1 would fundamentally undermine higher education's core mission of cultivating critical thinking, empathy, and comprehensive understanding across disciplines.

DEI initiatives are not peripheral to academic excellence, instead, they are essential to creating robust, innovative learning environments. When institutions limit diverse perspectives, they:

- Restrict intellectual discourse and critical analysis
- Reduce opportunities for marginalized students to access and succeed in higher education
- Diminish the quality of research by narrowing methodological and conceptual approaches
- Limit students' ability to develop cultural competence necessary for global citizenship

For students from marginalized communities, DEI initiatives are not abstract concepts but lifelines of support, validation, and opportunity. These programs create essential spaces where LGBTQ+ students, students of color, first-generation college students, and other underrepresented groups can find community, academic support, and institutional recognition. Without these initiatives, students may face increased isolation, structural challenges, and barriers that can significantly impede educational and professional advancement, effectively maintaining the very inequities these programs seek to dismantle.

I urge you to reject Senate Bill 1 and preserve these essential educational opportunities that are vital to creating a more just and effective learning environment.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. I will now take any questions you may have.