

Chairwomen Roegner, Vice Chair Cirino, Ranking Member Ingram and members of the Senate Committee:

My name is Hannah Ray. I am a current graduate student pursuing my Master's in Social Work at the Ohio State University. I spearheaded a DEI department for Akron Alpha Phi with whom I was a member during my undergraduate career at the University of Akron. Needless to say, I have first hand experience and knowledge in regards to how a DEI department is implemented on a college/university campus. I have witnessed a positive impact on my organization and its members as a result of DEI. I am strongly opposed to Senate Bill 1 and its companion bill HB 6.

As a prior Vice President of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, and currently pursuing a Master's in Social Work at the Ohio State University, I am compelled to express my profound concerns regarding Ohio Senate Bill 1, the "Advance Ohio Higher Education Act." This legislation poses significant threats to the principles of inclusivity and academic freedom that are foundational to both my professional role and educational pursuits.

In my capacity as VP of DEI, I have witnessed firsthand the transformative power of DEI initiatives in fostering inclusive environments where individuals from diverse backgrounds can thrive. These programs are not merely administrative functions; they are essential in promoting understanding, reducing discrimination, and preparing students to succeed in a diverse society. The bill's mandate to prohibit any orientation or training course regarding DEI and to dismantle existing DEI offices or departments is deeply troubling. Such actions would dismantle the very frameworks that support marginalized communities within our institutions.

As a graduate student in social work, my education is deeply intertwined with DEI principles. The proposed legislation's ban on DEI-related courses and training directly undermines the quality and relevance of my education. Social work, by its very nature, demands cultural competence and an understanding of systemic inequalities. Eliminating DEI content from the curriculum would leave me and my peers ill-equipped to serve diverse populations effectively.

Beyond my personal and professional concerns, this bill threatens to erode the progress our state has made toward inclusivity. DEI programs play a crucial role in addressing historical injustices and leveling the playing field for all students. By eliminating these initiatives, we risk perpetuating cycles of discrimination and ignorance. Moreover, the bill's prohibition on faculty strikes and its imposition of post-tenure reviews could stifle academic freedom and deter talented educators from serving in Ohio's institutions.

Reflecting on my journey, both as a DEI professional and a student, I recognize the invaluable impact that inclusive policies and education have had on my development. The relationships I've built, the perspectives I've gained, and the skills I've honed are all products of environments that celebrate diversity. Senate Bill 1 threatens to dismantle these environments, not just for me, but for countless others who seek growth and understanding through higher education in Ohio.

I urge lawmakers to consider the detrimental effects of Senate Bill 1 on our educational institutions and the communities they serve. Rather than advancing higher education, this bill regresses our progress toward a more equitable and just society. I stand in opposition to this legislation and advocate for the preservation and enhancement of DEI initiatives that enrich our campuses and society at large.

I ask you to consider my testimony and vote NO on the destructive bill that is Senate Bill 1. Thank you for the opportunity to testify.