

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 Eric Bentz. I am a resident of Columbus and Senate District 25, and a disabled Air Force Veteran. I attended The Ohio State University on the GI Bil, and recently graduated with a degree in Air Transportation. I am strongly opposed to SB1 and its companion bill HB6.

Although SB1 does not define inclusion (nor does it define diversity or equity), inclusion in an academic setting is generally regarded as an effort to provide resources for people who may be otherwise marginalized or excluded.

Student Veterans are typically a small percentage of a university's student population. Per statistics collected by the US Department of Veterans Affairs, only 15% of student Veterans are the traditional age of college students. Most student Veterans are ages 24-40. Families are common for student Veterans, as 47.3% of student Veterans are married and 47% of student Veterans have children. First-generation college students account for 62% of student Veterans. Roughly a third of student Veterans suffer from PTSD. These demographic factors put student Veterans at risk for marginalization.

The Ohio State University Military and Veterans Services office provides a variety of outreach and inclusion services to aid in the adjustment from active duty to college. These programs include assistance seeking accommodation with the university for service-connected disabilities, which is another inclusion program that may be at risk if this bill is passed. If this support system were to be severed with the outlawing of DEI programs and offices, veterans may feel less welcome at public colleges and universities in Ohio and choose colleges and universities in other states.

I ask you to consider my testimony and vote NO on this destructive bill. Thank you again for the opportunity to testify.

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Eric Bentz