

## **My testimony:**

### **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 Chandler Newman, and I am strongly opposed to Senator Bill 1, and its companion HB 6. My testimony reflects only my own opinions, and not that of any organization. After reading components included in the bill itself, hearing SB1 supporters give their reasonings in the proponent hearing for this bill, and hearing the perverse goals Jerry Cirino himself strives to achieve by passing this bill, it has become very clear to me that the potential destruction these efforts will cause are extremely revolting, and I am calling on the Senate of Higher Education Committee to listen to the voices of the very real students that will be impacted by this bill, instead of hiding behind the ignorant guise of “ending the woke status quo” without taking into account the real ramifications that will come out of bills like these. Senator Cirino - we are not here for, as you previously have stated, extra credit. We are here because we are real students who care about preserving the quality of our education and livelihoods. SB1, if passed, will open the floodgates for very dangerous things. As a black american growing up in Texas, I often experienced the constant sanitization of my black history throughout my K-12 years, and what made attending a university such as Kent State so special for me was all of the unique experiences I encountered with raw, diverse perspectives which allowed me to learn more about important issues surrounding race, gender, history, and more. When I was wrong, my thinking was challenged in a healthy way which encouraged me to delve deeper into my history and my way of thinking - and every student deserves that. We deserve to be surrounded with diverse perspectives that encourage us to think better, instead of leaving us unchallenged when broaching important, objective moments in history - which is something this bill directly contradicts. Instead, it argues that students should be allowed to reach their own conclusions, unchallenged - which is deeply wrong. While no student deserves to be mistreated by a teacher or other peer on campus due to their opinions, allowing students to sit in ignorance is what this bill ultimately will lead to, and that effort is counterintuitive for everyone involved. Not only this, but prohibiting institutions from challenging any false or “controversial” belief surrounding history enables extreme ignorance from holocaust deniers, racism deniers, etc. to enter our campuses unchecked and unchallenged. If the goal is to strengthen the quality of our higher education institutions within Ohio, this will do anything **except** that. People on this panel have previously stated that every opinion deserves to be seen & heard - which is another precedent held in the SB1 bill itself. However, I challenge this idea because certain ideas do not deserve to be heard, respected, or unchecked on college campuses under the guise of preserving the “right to an opinion” - when certain viewpoints are harmful and wrong. When approaching this sentiment, one previous incident I witnessed on this campus was immediately brought to mind. In 2023, the Kent State Republican group on campus targeted and harassed trans students with the intentions of mocking them, making them feel uncomfortable and unsafe on campus.

The issues students took with this group was not that they were a republican group on campus, but instead the viewpoints they expressed, and how they expressed them which is what made students on campus unsafe with this behavior. These kinds of viewpoints do not deserve to go unchecked, and under these new policies enacted by this bill, it would make challenging behavior like this almost possible if it were to take place within classrooms.

This bill also seeks to, and I quote, prohibit “The continuation of any diversity, equity, and inclusion offices or departments”, as well as put an end to any scholarships which use “diversity, equity, and inclusion” in any matter. As one would imagine, so many departments, offices, and scholarships which we utilize to succeed fall under the DEI umbrella, so the impact this will have if it goes into effect is devastating. Starting off - As a black American student travelling thousands of miles away from home to attend my PWI, programs on my campus such as Kupita Transicones and the Black United Student association were crucial parts to becoming grounded into my school. They allowed me to immediately connect with other students of color in an otherwise predominantly white space, where we could all share experiences and navigate the huge campus of Kent State long before the actual rush of college set in. They gave me a home - away -from home to confide in, and a safe place to be where I could have raw and unfiltered conversations about the black experience, my history, and more with students with shared values. Both of these initiatives were started to give students of color a fair voice, indeed fall under the DEI umbrella, and thus would cease to exist. The LGBTQ+ center is another place that would be impacted - a place that provides resources and solace for me and many other queer students on campus, and a place that is dedicated to ensuring all queer students are seen and heard.

Scholarships such as the Ohio College Opportunity Grant, the Women in STEM scholarship fund, and any other scholarship for students of color or any underrepresented group for that matter would face a devastating impact - and many of them would likely cease to exist. This prohibition of funds could hurt so many people and communities I deeply care about, and would prevent so many people from even finishing their education because they no longer have the funds to do so. If the goal is to restore “meritocracy” within higher education while putting students first, this does the exact opposite. It limits our abilities by stripping us of the resources and opportunities we have rightfully worked for and utilize to get through higher education. This bill could also affect SAS accommodations which is incredibly unjust, as these accommodations are given on a necessity basis and are a quintessential resource many students will not be able to go through higher education without.

And lastly, This bill is not, and will never be the solution to the many problems which have been brought up by members of the Senator Committee. Advocating for the possible sanitization of history within classrooms, leaving deeply wrong problematic opinions unchallenged, and dissolving class departments who teach the significance of raw unfiltered history and diversity will not make discussions on college campuses more enriching. Instead, it will make many of us extremely uncomfortable, unsafe, and ignorant. Doing away with DEI initiatives and resources will not “restore meritocracy”. Instead, it will strip marginalized and underrepresented communities in Ohio of even more opportunities, which does not give us equal and fair chances

at showcasing our best abilities - which is what the heart of meritocracy should be. Tokenism will exist whether or not DEI initiatives take place around the country - because the issues are with bigotry and racism, not ensuring all communities across our state country are equally represented with equal opportunity.

Because of all of this and more, I encourage you all to vote **no** on this outrageously harmful bill. If you claim to be for the betterment of students, listen to how harmful bills like these will affect us, and advocate for better rather than working against us.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify, and I will now open the floor for any questions you may have.