

Opponent Testimony for Senate Bill 1

Senate Higher Education Committee

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The Ohio State University

Thank you, Chair Roegner, Vice Chair Cirino, Ranking Member Ingram, and members of the committee, for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Megan McNutt. I am a proud graduate of The Ohio State University, where I spent five years on the Varsity Women's Rowing Team, and now I am a first-year medical student at OSU. As a former student-athlete, a gay woman, and a future physician, I am here to express my strong opposition to Senate Bill 1 because it threatens the principles of diversity, equity, and inclusion that have shaped who I am and will impact my ability to care for diverse patient populations in the future.

When I first arrived at Ohio State, I didn't fully know who I was or who I wanted to be. But through the support of a diverse community and inclusive initiatives, I found my voice, my confidence, and my purpose. These experiences profoundly shaped me as a student, a leader, and now a future physician. Senate Bill 1 threatens to dismantle these vital opportunities and undermine the progress we've made toward educational and social equity.

Diversity brings strength and innovation. As a rower at Ohio State, I had teammates from over 10 different countries around the world. These different perspectives challenged me to think creatively and problem-solve more effectively. Diversity is not just a buzzword—it's a driver of excellence. In my medical education, learning alongside classmates with diverse life experiences helps me develop the cultural humility and empathy needed to treat every patient with dignity and respect. Understanding the cultural, social, and personal factors that shape health decisions is essential to providing compassionate, comprehensive care.

Equity ensures that everyone has a fair chance to succeed, regardless of their starting point. Supporting equity means providing resources and opportunities for all individuals to develop the skills and confidence they need to thrive.

Inclusion fosters a sense of belonging. Under Gene Smith's leadership, the athletic department at Ohio State worked hard to create spaces where all athletes felt seen and

valued. In 2020, I co-founded an organization of LGBTQ+ student-athletes to create a safe and inclusive space for sharing experiences. This space empowered us to contribute more fully to our respective teams and foster better understanding among athletes.

I have seen firsthand that environments promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion lead to better outcomes in academics and athletics. They foster innovation, collaboration, and personal growth. These principles will also make me a better physician, prepared to care for diverse patient populations.

Senate Bill 1 presents serious concerns for educational freedom at colleges and universities like Ohio State, potentially weakening educational standards, particularly for medical students like me. It interferes with academic freedom by imposing politically driven restrictions on teaching and research involving critical topics such as climate policy, electoral politics, immigration, and reproductive rights, all of which directly affect patients' health. As a future physician, I must be prepared to meet the needs of a diverse patient population by understanding how social, cultural, and political factors influence health outcomes. Limiting education on these critical issues undermines our ability to provide comprehensive and empathetic care, ultimately compromising patient outcomes. These are critical areas where education and research must be grounded in evidence and expertise, not political interference. Additionally, the bill threatens to defund initiatives that foster a sense of belonging on campus, making it harder for students, faculty, and staff to thrive.

I respectfully urge you to vote no on Senate Bill 1 and protect the diverse, equitable, and inclusive environments that foster educational and professional excellence across Ohio. Thank you for your time and attention. I am happy to answer any questions.