

Testimony of Christine Banks-VanAllen, MA, LPCC-S
February 10, 2025

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 Christine Banks-VanAllen, and I am a Licensed Professional Clinical Counselor writing to you as a private citizen. I am **strongly opposed** to Senate Bill 1.

As a professional dedicated to education and mental health, I have seen firsthand how race and gender influence individuals' experiences, particularly in counseling and diagnosis. Senate Bill 1 prevents me from addressing issues related to race and gender in my teaching, directly contradicting the American Counseling Association (ACA) Code of Ethics, which emphasizes the importance of cultural sensitivity in diagnosis. The ACA Code of Ethics explicitly states that counselors must consider clients' socioeconomic and cultural experiences when diagnosing mental disorders and recognize historical and social prejudices that have led to misdiagnoses and pathologization of marginalized groups.

Historically, the field of diagnosis has been used to reinforce societal biases. For example, Black individuals have been disproportionately diagnosed with schizophrenia while being underdiagnosed for affective disorders, in part due to racial biases in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM). Women, particularly those from marginalized communities, have often been dismissed or labeled with disorders like hysteria rather than receiving appropriate care. Senate Bill 1's restrictions on discussing diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) would prevent future professionals from recognizing and addressing these biases, perpetuating a cycle of misdiagnosis and inadequate care for historically marginalized populations.

Furthermore, diagnosis does not exist in a vacuum—it is shaped by cultural and societal forces. Without the ability to openly discuss these factors, educators and mental health professionals will be ill-equipped to serve diverse populations effectively. Prohibiting discussions on DEI deprives students of a comprehensive education that aligns with ethical counseling practices and hinders the profession's ability to correct historical injustices in mental health care.

More personally, DEI advocacy is the reason I was able to return to a job after taking maternity leave, is the reason men's bathrooms have changing tables, and is the reason my son with Autism receives the supports he needs in school. My best friend, an Army veteran, considers herself a DEI hire due to her status as a veteran. DEI advocacy has been tremendously helpful to all demographics in our society. DEI is NOT just about Black and Trans people. I urge you to consider the full range of what DEI means to your constituents and the ways in which supporting diversity efforts contributes to the future of our society.

I urge you to consider my testimony and vote **NO** on this harmful bill. Thank you again for the opportunity to testify in writing.

Sincerely submitted as a private citizen,
Christine Banks-VanAllen, MA, LPCC-S
Licensed Professional Clinical/Lecturer in Counselor Education and Supervision