

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 Kate Barton. I live in Wilmington, Ohio and I am a small business owner and proud Ohio State alum. I am strongly opposed to SB 1 and its companion bill HB 6.

In the mid-2010s, I worked for the Ohio State University as a specialist for a policy that, at the time, was brand new. After an audit, the university realized that there was a vulnerable community currently unprotected from systemic harm and chose to address that inequity with the creation of a new policy. My job was to monitor the database that tracked policy compliance, conduct site visits to relevant programs to confirm policy awareness and represent the university as a policy expert and training resource, and to liaison between the relevant parties and the university's legal team. Today, that policy is housed in the university's Office of Institutional Equity. Now, I know what the supporters of this bill are thinking: "excellent, this is exactly the type of job and policy I hope to get rid of. Institutional equity? Vulnerable community? Systemic harm? Sounds like a waste."

The community that policy was written to protect was minors. Until the audit was done, Ohio State did not realize that it was serving over **600,000 minors** every year across its many programs: summer camps including music, science, sports, art, drama, etc.; internships in technology, physics, chemistry, law for brilliant high school students to learn about professional research; after school programs and summer-time programming for underprivileged kids; and the Ohio 4-H program. I'm not sure how many people realize(d) that it was Ohio State that started that program, which I know our rural communities cherish, mine included-- I could go on. The university created and staffed a policy to ensure that the program directors were fully aware of their responsibilities to protect a community that we as a society recognize requires **insitutional** support. It is a DEI policy housed in a DEI office, and this bill aims to ban all DEI initiatives and **punish** those involved with them. **This bill would** result either in the extinction of many of these programs (as they remain an area of harm exposure), or a return to a time when there was no policy establishing accountability for the people that run them.

Regardless of what you think now that you know the actual details of why that role existed and why it should continue to exist, the point is this: this bill isn't **just** dangerous because it is a grotesque governmental overreach **carried out with a wrecking ball**, but

because it is becoming clear to me that the members of this committee may not even have taken the time to understand the “agenda” they say is single-handedly destroying society.

Enough people in this state recognized this body’s unjustifiable conduct with regard to our gerrymandered electoral maps, and worked hard to get Issue 1 on the 2024 ballot, which would have outlawed such blatant gerrymandering. How many people in this chamber and in this state know that the Ohio GOP chair publicly **bragged** last month, and I’m quoting, “A lot of people were saying, ‘We’re confused! We’re confused by Issue 1.’ Did you hear that? Confusion means we don’t know, so we did our job...Confusing Ohioans was not such a bad strategy.” End quote. The same party that is pushing SB 1 knew then what they know now: their extremist agenda does not have the majority support from the public, so instead they have to obfuscate their goals behind vague language and aggressive disinformation campaigns.

SB 1 and HB 6 are just new examples of those same bad-faith politics. SB 1 does not aim to make universities better, it aims to hollow them out because they allow people to express freedom and seek truth. The creators of this bill **do not want** educated or under-represented communities to have resources or perspectives because, when empowered, those are the communities that will stand up and hold them accountable.

This bill is part of a larger anti-knowledge, anti-truth, anti-workers agenda, and I am sick of tiptoeing around that fact; it is a shameless attempt to stifle speech, weaken institutions of knowledge, and endanger educators.

I ask you to consider my testimony and vote NO on this destructive, extremist bill.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify.

Quote source: <https://www.thenews-messenger.com/story/news/local/2025/01/14/ohio-gop-chair-brags-confusing-ohioans-during-election/77669351007/>