

Audrey Ansel – Senate Bill 1 Opponent 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 Audrey Ansel. I am a junior at Ohio University studying communication studies and I am also a student staff member at the Ohio University Pride Center. I am strongly opposed to SB 1 and its companion bill HB 6.

If Senate Bill 1 passes, not only will I lose my job, but I will lose the sense of community that brought me to Ohio and Ohio University. I am an out-of-state student from North Carolina, and when it came time for me to make my college decision, my safety and comfort as a queer person was at the forefront of my mind. I also knew that I wanted to get my degree in communications from a school with a reputable program. These criteria eventually led me to Ohio University. Not only is Ohio University internationally recognized for excellence in communications, but Ohio University was especially notable for its well-established and accessible LGBTQ resources. Ohio University gave me the opportunity to get a certificate in LGBT studies (something I could not find in North Carolina) as well as an LGBTQ friendly dorm space and of course, the Pride Center.

These resources were impossible to find at the other schools I considered, and I was confident I would receive a quality education at Ohio University. Thus, I was willing to move 7 hours away from my support system to pursue my degree. I was also fortunate enough to get a job at the Pride Center my freshman year and that job has gifted me with skills I will carry with me into the workforce. Without resources like the Pride Center, and diversity and inclusion efforts on college campuses, I would likely not have chosen Ohio for college.

DEI helps students to think critically, learn boldly, and approach the world with a curious mind. And in a simpler way, diversity efforts increase college enrollment and bring some of the world's greatest thinkers to this great state. Attacks on DEI often claim that students are being wrongfully silenced in the classroom. But what we fail to consider when we talk about protecting intellectual diversity is that true intellectual freedom is fostered by the work done by diversity and inclusion programs.

If you ban DEI on Ohio's college campuses, thousands of students like me will look elsewhere to further their education. Thousands of students will take their unique perspectives, experiences, and skills to other states where they see their freedoms being truly protected. On a surface level, there will be a decline in enrollment and therefore a decline in revenue. But the real loss will be suffered in classrooms where diversity has somehow become the villain. No longer will students

find themselves challenged to grow and evolve through their studies. True intellectual freedom will become the enemy. This bill will do irreparable harm to the current students and faculty of Ohio's universities and will cause many scholars to take their insight elsewhere, to the detriment of this state and its success.

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

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify.

I will now take any questions you may have.