

Testimony of Jason Whitfield, Ph.D., CCC-SLP
Before the Senate Workforce and Higher Education Committee
Senator Kristina Roegner, Chair
February 10, 2025

Chair Roegner, Vice Chair Cirino, Ranking Member Ingram, and Members of the Higher Education Committee:

My name is Jason Whitfield, Ph.D., CCC-SLP. I am an associate professor of Communication Sciences and Disorders in the College of Health and Human Services at Bowling Green State University (BGSU), where I have taught for ten years. I do not represent BGSU; I am submitting testimony as a private citizen in opposition to SB 1 (SB 1).

After closely reviewing SB 1 and comparing it with the standards and competencies of various allied health fields, several key sections of SB 1 are directly related to accreditation standards that are required by national professional and accrediting bodies. The term Diversity, which is not well defined within SB 1, is well defined within the accreditation policies outlined below. In a general sense, Diversity incorporates a range of factors including, but not limited to, age, disability, ethnicity, first language, gender, nationality, race, religion, sexual orientation, socioeconomic class, and veteran status. Numerous accreditation bodies require programs to incorporate aspects related to Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) into curricula, policies, and procedures within academic programs. Specific examples are outlined below:

Audiology & Speech-Language Pathology. Accreditation standards ([CAA-ASHA](#)) require Audiology and Speech-Language Pathology programs to infuse DEI content throughout the curriculum and integrate cultural humility into service delivery. Students must be given opportunities to identify and acknowledge implicit and explicit bias, recognize the impact of cultural and linguistic variables on patient care, understand social determinants of health, and acknowledge cultural and linguistic diversity among various groups. Implementation strategies include DEI workshops and learning opportunities for faculty and students.

Dietetics. Accreditation standards ([ACEND](#)) require Nutrition and Dietetics Didactic Programs to incorporate DEI concepts into various aspects of the curriculum, including cultural humility, self-reflection, and DEI competency building in learning activities. Additionally, faculty and preceptors must undergo DEI training on strategies to recognize and monitor biases and reduce instances of microaggressions and discrimination. Programs are also required to demonstrate tangible action towards enrolling a diverse student body and establish policies to support equitable treatment of students from all backgrounds.

Physical Therapy. Accreditation standards ([CAPTE](#)) require Physical Therapy programs to implement student recruitment and admission policies that are based on appropriate and equitable criteria and are designed to enhance the diversity of the student body. Proposed revisions to the standards will likely require programs to incorporate DEI throughout the curriculum and promote cultural humility among faculty and students.

Social Work. Accreditation standards ([CSWE](#)) require students in Social Work programs to meet competencies related to advancing human rights and engaging in anti-racism, diversity, and equity. Programs are required to integrate DEI practices and content across all aspects of the curricular design and address issues such as racism, privilege, and discrimination.

SB 1 will not only affect programs that train audiologists, dieticians, physical therapists, social workers, and speech-language pathologists, but it will also ban similar requirements for accredited programs that prepare [medical doctors](#), [physicians assistants](#), [pharmacists](#), and [occupational therapists](#), among numerous other health and human service professions. Enacting SB 1 could jeopardize the accreditation of numerous professionally accredited programs in Ohio, as it would prohibit required aspects of professional training related to DEI. In Ohio, there are over 115 professionally accredited programs that train future practitioners in the nine disciplines listed above. This number does not include other accredited programs in allied health fields, human service, and education that have similar accreditation standards.

Larger Impact

Enforcing the requirements outlined in SB 1 threatens the very foundation of academic inquiry and professional training. A key provision of the bill mandates universities to disseminate “knowledge and citizenship education.” In practice, “citizenship education” has often been narrowly defined as promoting national pride, patriotism, and obedience. By inserting this phrase, SB 1 covertly imposes an ideological mandate under the guise of free inquiry and “intellectual” diversity. This requirement, along with other provisions in the bill, undermines academic freedom by dictating how citizenship is taught while suppressing critical engagement and alternative perspectives.

By restricting diverse perspectives in higher education, this bill denies all students—regardless of their field—the opportunity to develop the analytical skills and cultural competencies necessary to address real-world challenges. Critical thinking, engagement with differing viewpoints, and an understanding of structural inequality are essential to producing well-rounded professionals. Nowhere is this more vital than in health and human services, where responsive and compassionate care requires practitioners to recognize and address the lived experiences of their patients.

Failure to incorporate these critical components into education and practice will have devastating health and economic consequences for Ohioans. A CDC report shows a concerning rise in maternal mortality rates, with Black women facing a death rate more than twice that of white women. Another CDC report indicates that in 2019, the age-adjusted death rate in rural areas was 20% higher than in urban and suburban areas. Moreover, healthcare disparities impose a significant economic burden, with [a report](#) from the National Institutes of Health estimating that racial and ethnic health inequities cost the U.S. economy \$451 billion in 2018 due to excess medical costs, lost productivity, and premature deaths. These disparities highlight the systemic vulnerabilities within our healthcare systems that cannot be effectively addressed without training that acknowledges and responds to such health inequalities. The best way to improve health outcomes for all Ohioans is to equip future professionals with the skills to navigate these challenges with compassion and evidence-based strategies.

For these reasons, I urge you to consider the serious consequences of this legislation and vote **NO** on SB 1. Thank you for allowing me to submit testimony. I welcome any questions you may have.

References

- Curtin, S. C., & Spencer, M. R. (2021). Trends in death rates in urban and rural areas: United States, 1999–2019. NCHS Data Brief, No. 417. National Center for Health Statistics. Retrieved from: <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/databriefs/db417.pdf>
- Hoyert, D. L. (2023). Maternal Mortality Rates in the United States, 2021. National Center for Health Statistics. Retrieved from: <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/hestat/maternal-mortality/2021/maternal-mortality-rates-2021.pdf>

Referenced Accreditation Policies

LCME (Liaison Committee on Medical Education)

- Policy: https://lcme.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/2024-25-Functions-and-Structure_2023-03-21.docx
- 6 accredited Medical Schools in Ohio

ARC-PA (Accreditation Review Commission on Education for the Physician Assistant)

- Policy: <https://www.arc-pa.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/Standards-5th-Ed-March-2023.pdf>
- 17 accredited Physician Assistant Programs in Ohio (12 Continued; 5 provisional)

ACPE (Accreditation Council for Pharmacy Education)

- Policy: <https://www.acpe-accredit.org/pdf/Rubric2016Guidelines20bUpdate2022.pdf>
- 7 accredited Pharmacy Programs in Ohio

ACOTE (Accreditation Council for Occupational Therapy Education)

- Policy: <https://acoteonline.org/accreditation-explained/standards/>
- 5 accredited Doctoral of Occupational Therapy Programs in Ohio
- 6 accredited Masters of Occupational Therapy Programs in Ohio

CAPTE (Commission on Accreditation in Physical Therapy Education)

- Policy: <https://www.capteonline.org/globalassets/capte-docs/capte-pt-standards-required-elements.pdf>
- 11 accredited Physical Therapy Programs in Ohio

ACEND (Accreditation Council for Education in Nutrition and Dietetics)

- Policy: <https://www.eatrightpro.org/-/media/files/eatrightpro/acend/accreditation-standards-fees-and-policies/2022-standards-and-templates/2022-accreditation-standards-for-nutrition-and-dietetics-didactic-programs.pdf>
- 11 accredited Nutrition and Dietetics Didactic Programs in Ohio

CSWE (Council on Social Work Education)

- Policy: <https://www.cswe.org/getmedia/94471c42-13b8-493b-9041-b30f48533d64/2022-EPAS.pdf>
- 27 accredited Baccalaureate Social Work Programs
- 11 accredited Masters Social Work Programs

CAA-ASHA (Council on Academic Accreditation)

- Policy: <https://caa.asha.org/siteassets/files/accreditation-standards-for-graduate-programs.pdf>
- 4 accredited Audiology Programs in Ohio
- 12 accredited Speech-Language Pathology Programs in Ohio