

Emily's Testimony against the Advance Ohio Higher Education Act
Senate Higher Education Committee
2/10/25

Emily Gee
Ohio Student

Chair Roegner, Vice Chair Cerino, Ranking Member Ingram, and members of the Higher Education Committee,

Thank you for allowing me to testify today. My name is Emily Gee (she/her/hers). I am a daughter. I am a sister. I am a concerned student. I am a first generation Chinese American. At one of the most diverse campuses in Ohio, I am grateful to see how my campus has worked hard toward providing its students fair opportunities to succeed, as well as the resources to do so. I write to you today to oppose this controversial bill and voice my concerns for the future generation of college students to succeed me once I graduate. The rigidity of the bill's call for the dissolution of DEI initiatives will usher in a new wave of discrimination among the places that this will affect, such as schools and places of work, despite the bill's supposed intent to end discrimination and endorse free speech.

My parents emigrated to the United States from China with nothing with them but two hundred dollars and the clothes on their backs. They worked nineteen hours a day to make enough money to support me and my brother to give us the opportunities and education that they were never able to receive. I lost my father to cancer in highschool, just as I was on the precipice of applying to colleges. My situation seemed bleak, and I was unsure of how I was going to go to my dream college as a low-income family with only one source of income. I am beyond blessed to have discovered various scholarships geared toward supporting low-income students and students of color because without them, I would not be months away from graduating from my dream college with a perfect GPA—something I never deemed possible. The sad thing is, I know that I am not the only student with various inequities working against them. There are students who face just about every adversity out there, which they must work arduously against to get even a fair chance at getting a decent education.

I have a huge family, and most of them reside in the poorer areas of Cleveland, Ohio. I have a little cousin who is twelve years old, and she is beyond intelligent for her age. When she visited my dad in the hospital, she sang him a song of courage and love, and she read a poem for me in Spanish. She was eight years old at the time. I think I could hardly read in English when I was her age. I know that when she goes to school, she wants to learn fractions and spelling. The reality? She has to worry about the violence in her school, the racism she faces as the only Chinese girl in her school, and the threats of gun violence. She is twelve years old. When I was her age, I, too, dealt with macroaggressions and microaggressions every single day in school, both from my peers and even

from my teachers. My teachers, who are tasked with educating and raising a well-spoken generation of students, would be racist to me right to my face. A younger me dreamed of a time where little girls like me would never have to worry about getting asked if they eat dogs, sitting alone because their lunch was not a peanut butter and jelly sandwich, or being told their English was “good for a Chinese person.” Upon my entry into college, I learned about each part of DEI and for once, I felt like my dream of no longer being discriminated against could possibly come true. I thought of my brilliant little cousin, who might not have to worry about being bullied for her culture or might not have to worry about getting into a good, if not great, college. I felt hopeful for that little girl—a poor, first-generation Chinese American—who might have a shot at leaving the town she was trapped in. Now, there are threats to DEI initiatives that compromise her, families like mine, and the overall future of marginalized groups. Without DEI initiatives, students who may face systemic barriers—such as students of color, LGBTQ+ students, or those with disabilities—might not receive the support they need to succeed. Students from underrepresented or marginalized groups might feel excluded or underrepresented. Without DEI efforts, there could be a lack of cultural sensitivity, making it harder for these students to see themselves reflected in the curriculum or feel welcome in the school environment. DEI aims to increase exposure to diverse perspectives, which helps students develop better social skills and empathy for others. Without a focus on DEI, students might miss opportunities to understand different cultures, backgrounds, and experiences, which can negatively impact their ability to navigate a diverse world later on. Diversity, equity, and inclusion are central to discussions about social justice, history, and ethics. Without DEI initiatives, schools may miss important opportunities for students to engage with these topics in a meaningful way, limiting their ability to think critically about the world around them. If DEI is not emphasized, students may enter the workforce or society with less understanding of how to collaborate with diverse groups. This could lead to a less cohesive society where issues of inequality persist and grow. In short, the absence of DEI initiatives could contribute to greater inequities and challenges for both students and educators, limiting personal growth, academic achievement, and social development for everyone involved.

I am actively resisting the committee’s motion to disband all DEI initiatives across the state under the pretense that it urges people to form their own opinions and encourages free speech. This is inherently untrue and to believe this excuse is nonsensical and foolish. This bill is blatantly discriminatory and unconstitutional, and the irony of it all is not lost on me. The proponents of this bill claim to champion diversity of thought and free speech, yet they are, instead, trying to censor what can be taught in universities and reframing what can be taught to fit their biased, skewed ideas of what should be taught in schools. This bill is not written with students’ best intentions in mind, and it is a shameless attempt to exert authoritarian influence over Ohio’s schools. I ask that you please consider my testimony and vote NO on this bill.

Thank you. I’m happy to answer any questions.