

Chair Roegner, Vice Chair Cirino, and members of the Senate Higher Education Committee,

My name is Abby Hobbs, and I am a second-year law student at the University of Cincinnati College of Law, as well as a master's student in Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies. I am writing to you on my own behalf—and as an out-of-state student leader—to testify in opposition to Senate Bill 1. I am writing to you to address two key issues: the bill's impact on out-of-state student interest and its threat to student safety.

Out-of-state students will leave Ohio—taking their money with them.

I am originally from New Mexico, yet I chose to leave my home state and forgo in-state tuition for the educational opportunities offered at the University of Cincinnati. When applying to law schools, I sought a university that embraced a diversity of thought, prioritized public interest, and advocated for underrepresented communities. I found that at UC, particularly in its joint degree program in Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies—one of only three such programs in the country. This program was a defining factor in my decision to move across the country and take on significant student debt for out-of-state tuition, all in pursuit of an education that values inclusivity and critical discourse.

This bill does not just threaten diversity of thought—it threatens my future. If passed, this bill threatens the existence of the joint degree program in Women's Studies, a program that has operated for 30 years, producing graduates and attracting students from across the country. Without this program, I would not have come to Ohio. In fact, with only one year left in my education, I would seriously consider transferring if this bill becomes law. I am not alone—several of my out-of-state classmates have expressed similar concerns and would leave Ohio for states that do not stifle freedom of speech and expression.

This bill threatens student safety

For months, the LGBTQ and Women's centers on campus have been targeted with vandalism and threats. Slurs and messages like "DEI is DEAD" have been scrawled across their walls, and their property has been destroyed. These are not isolated incidents—they are part of a growing climate of hostility. By banning DEI initiatives, this bill emboldens those who seek to harm marginalized students, sending a dangerous message that acts of intimidation and violence are acceptable. When the state declares conversations about diversity and equal opportunity "controversial" or unworthy of support, it puts students at greater risk. Marginalized students will feel less safe, less supported, and less likely to seek help when they experience discrimination or harassment. This will make it harder for universities to recruit and retain talent, ultimately weakening Ohio's higher education system.

I urge this committee to reject Senate Bill 1 and ensure that Ohio remains a place where students—both in-state and out-of-state—feel welcomed, valued, and safe in their pursuit of higher education.