

Opposition Testimony of Michelle Huang SB No.1 Senate Higher Education Committee

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 Michelle Huang, and I am a junior at Olentangy Liberty High School, and as a student fearful for the future of my education—a future currently being decided without the input of those it is intended to serve—I am strongly opposed to SB 1 and its companion bill, HB 6.

From the moment I stepped into my first high school history class, I was taught that education is meant to challenge perspectives, force us to grapple with our own biases, and prepare us to embrace the complexities of a world in which we are bound to change. Yet, I remember a moment in my sophomore year when a class discussion on systemic inequality suddenly felt tense—students hesitated to speak, and my teacher, who had always touted critical thinking as a means to broaden our perspectives, carefully tiptoed around certain topics. Later, I learned that teachers feared backlash for discussing anything deemed "controversial," despite those very topics being essential to understanding our society.

Like its prior iteration, SB 83, this bill threatens academic freedom by restricting discussions on so-called "controversial" topics, which could discourage open discourse in classrooms. As a student preparing for college, I worry that these vague limitations will prevent me from engaging in critical conversations about history, politics, and social issues—conversations that are essential to my growth as an informed citizen. And as senators, you too should understand that empowering younger Ohioans to become civically engaged citizens is quintessential to the future of our government and beyond. But I pose the question: How can this generation of students learn if we aren't exposed to the open discourse that this bill seeks to suppress? The research is clear: According to a 2023 American Association of Colleges and Universities report, students exposed to diverse viewpoints and critical thinking curricula are 40% more likely to develop higher-order reasoning skills, which are crucial for both academic and professional success. Restricting this kind of education puts Ohio students at a disadvantage.

In fact, studies show that universities with strong DEI initiatives see higher retention rates for first-generation, minority, and low-income students. A 2022 study by McKinsey & Company found that institutions with comprehensive DEI efforts experienced a 20% increase in graduation rates among marginalized student populations. By eliminating

these programs, Ohio risks alienating a significant portion of its underrepresented student body and making our universities less attractive to prospective students.

I ask you to consider my testimony and vote NO on this harmful bill. Ohio students deserve an education that encourages thought, not one that stifles it.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify.