

Chair Roegner, Vice Chair Cirino, Ranking Member Ingram, and members of the Senate Workforce and Higher Education Committee,

Thank you for allowing me to testify. My name is Claire Underwood. I am a doctoral student writing to express my strong opposition to SB 1 and its companion bill HB 6.

As an educator and researcher dedicated to advancing sustainability and inclusivity in higher education, I have witnessed firsthand the transformative power of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives. These efforts not only enrich the academic environment but also prepare students to thrive in a diverse and interconnected world. Senate Bill 1, by proposing the elimination of DEI initiatives and restricting critical conversations, undermines the very mission of higher education: to foster critical thinking, open dialogue, and the free exchange of ideas.

I have collaborated with colleagues and students from diverse backgrounds, each contributing unique perspectives that enrich our research and teaching practices. The proposed legislation would stifle this diversity of thought, hindering our ability to address complex challenges and diminishing the richness of the educational experience.

Moreover, I moved to Ohio to pursue my education and contribute to research that addresses pressing environmental and educational challenges. Like many graduate students and educators, I planned to build a career here and contribute to Ohio's academic community. If this bill were to pass, it would negatively impact my ability to secure employment in higher education. Ohio would become less appealing for scholars and educators who seek a state where academic freedom and inclusivity are valued. This would harm not only me but also the many highly qualified professionals who might now avoid relocating to or remaining in Ohio, further diminishing the state's academic landscape.

The bill's prohibition on faculty strikes further infringes upon educators' rights to advocate for fair working conditions—conditions that are essential for maintaining high educational standards. This erosion of rights would significantly impact the quality of education available to students.

I urge you to recognize the detrimental effects Senate Bill 1 would have on our higher education system, the economy, and Ohio's reputation as a center for academic excellence. I respectfully ask that you oppose this bill to preserve the integrity, inclusivity, and competitiveness of Ohio's universities.

Thank you for your consideration.