

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

Thank you for allowing me to submit my written testimony. My name is Dr. Kelsey Ward. I am a licensed counselor and counselor educator. I am strongly opposed to SB 1 and its companion bill HB 6.

These bills are inherently harmful by stripping away the ability to explore diversity, equity, and inclusion within the learning environment. As a counselor educator, if I am unable to teach about these topics, counselors will no longer have the information necessary to treat *all* of their clients, as we care for people from all backgrounds. If we remove the ability to explore topics that are diverse in nature, not only are we destroying free speech, we are placing future clients in harm's way by disallowing educators to teach counselors how to appropriately care for people of all backgrounds. This would impact women, LGBTQ+ people, veterans, folks with disabilities, the elderly, and many, many more, as diversity, equity, and inclusion policies ensure that these voices can be heard alongside everyone else.

The vast majority of mental health providers are [white women in their 40s](#); without proper education on diversity, equity, and inclusion, it becomes much more challenging to care for clients who are people of color, a different gender, or a different age, as their experiences and needs are quite different than that of the counselor with the average demographics.

If educators are not permitted to teach about the realities of the world around us, we will see a dangerous impact on those in the mental health field and other helping professions, which ultimately directly affects the citizens of Ohio. It is imperative that you consider the devastating impact of what it would mean to disallow education about the experiences of people who are seeking mental health services. Ohioans deserve to be seen for who they are, and for their providers to be educated and trained on the best ways to support and care for them.

I ask you to consider my testimony and vote NO on this destructive bill.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify.

*Kelsey Ward, PhD, LPCC-S, NCC, CCMHC*