

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 Catherine Ryczek. I am a resident of Waynesville, OH, am an alumni of Wittenberg University, and am a disabled educator of ESL (English as a second language) both abroad as well as in Ohio.

I am very opposed to SB 1 and its companion bill HB 6.

Wittenberg University, though a private university, has adopted many “DEI” programs inspired directly and brought about by the nearby state university, Wright State University—a pioneer for disability access in Ohio, and one of the top 3 disability-friendly universities in the nation.

As a disabled person, I oppose this bill because for me, “DEI” meant accessibility services to help me succeed in completing my degree, as well as a creating a positive experience for me while living on campus. I have since become an educator of ESL both abroad and as well as in Ohio—my work also creating accessibility through the teaching of English as a second language to minorities.

Though ESL accessibility is also widely viewed as a “DEI” program, I firmly believe that my work has fostered to many a favorable attitude towards this country, as well as given many an opportunity to contribute to our economy and society that otherwise may have not been able to so.

Ridding “DEI” programs in education means ridding the nation of millions of workers and contributors to our financial system. It is not an inhibitor to the economic well-being our country but rather a *enabler* economic mobility: of innovation, entrepreneurship, and competitive advantage. We have seen an increase of profitability across many organizations who correctly utilize DEI, especially employee retention, which caused an easing of the higher unemployment rate that occurred during 2020.

I strongly urge you to not give up on these programs simply because it is incorrectly utilized as only a “PR opportunity” among a handful of companies, and has become a misunderstood political weapon of hate and fear under the current Trump Administration. “DEI” has created a life for me and many others in our wonderfully accessible country—please do not take this away from me and my fellow Ohioans, pushing for our opportunity to blossom.

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

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify.