

Opponent Testimony

Jean Henderson

Citizen

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Chair, Vice Chair, Ranking Member and members of the Higher Education Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in opposition to this proposed legislation. While I appreciate the intention of ensuring accountability, transparency, and quality in higher education, this bill introduces several concerning provisions that would ultimately hinder the ability of institutions to fulfill their missions and meet the needs of students and faculty.

SB1 threatens the foundation of higher education by limiting academic freedom and institutional independence. Banning diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) programs disrupts educators' ability to address critical social issues and build inclusive environments where all students can succeed. Without DEI efforts, students may be less prepared for the realities of a diverse workplace and society, while faculty lose tools to address inequities and foster understanding. The bill's restrictions on hiring practices could discourage valuing diverse perspectives, making it harder to attract top educators and researchers, and weakening Ohio's academic competitiveness.

This bill also risks serious real-world consequences for Ohio's colleges and universities. By imposing rigid legislative control over curricula and research, it could block access to federal and private grants that prioritize diversity efforts, costing institutions vital funding. Broad and vague rules, such as bans on "ideological endorsements," create confusion and may lead to unnecessary lawsuits or penalties. Instead of promoting intellectual diversity and academic excellence, S.B. No. 1 could damage the quality and reputation of Ohio's higher education system, leaving students, faculty, and the state at a disadvantage. I urge the committee to rethink this bill and its potential harm.

When today's politicians were in college, you benefited from the freedom to explore diverse ideas, engage in open discussions about politics, religion, and social issues, and learn in an environment free from excessive government interference. However, now you seek to impose restrictions on the very freedoms you once enjoyed, threatening to limit the academic experience for future generations.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

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