

February 8, 2025

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

Thank you for allowing me to provide my testimonial. My name is Marla Szoradi, and I am a resident of Vermilion Township in Erie County. As a mother of three sons—two young adults and one school-aged—I am deeply concerned about Senate Bill 1 (SB 1) and I strongly oppose this.

While I am not an academic, I do not believe one needs to be in order to recognize the serious problems this bill presents. I would like to highlight three key concerns:

1. **The Importance of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) in Higher Education** DEI initiatives are essential because equity does not naturally occur within our current societal structures. Throughout history, marginalized groups—including women, people of color, the LGBTQ community, and individuals with disabilities—have had to fight for basic rights and opportunities. Higher education should foster an environment that supports diversity, ensuring all students have a chance to thrive.
2. **The Harmful Message Sent by Eliminating DEI Programs and Scholarships** Eliminating DEI programs sends a clear and damaging message to historically marginalized groups. It tells women, people of color, individuals with disabilities, LGBTQ, and those from diverse cultural and religious backgrounds that they are not welcome or valued. By removing these resources, this bill isolates and disempowers these communities, rather than fostering an inclusive and equitable learning environment.
3. **Attacks on Faculty Rights and Academic Freedom** Restricting faculty members' right to strike and censoring their professional expertise undermines their ability to advocate for fair working conditions and academic integrity. Faculty strikes in public universities are rare and typically occur in response to serious issues. Limiting these rights appears to be part of a broader effort to weaken collective bargaining in Ohio, which threatens not only educators but also the quality of higher education itself.

Finally, I question why this legislation is even necessary. As Americans, we already have the freedom to form our own opinions, choose our educational paths, and engage with the perspectives we find most compelling. This bill represents an unnecessary and dangerous overreach that seeks to control and censor education rather than improve it.

I am not typically an activist, but I cannot stay silent on this issue. I encouraged my son to attend Kent State University so he could learn in a diverse and enriching environment. My other son, benefited from the transfer of his Individualized Education Program (IEP) to Lorain County Community College, allowing him to earn an associate's degree and build a career—he is now a proud Ford employee. These opportunities exist because of policies that support inclusion, not policies that dismantle them.

I urge you to reject SB 1. This bill does not strengthen Ohio's higher education system—it weakens it, strips away essential rights, and sends a regressive message to our students and educators.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,



Marla Szoradi