

Testimony for Senate Bill 1
Submitted by: Nicolyn Woodcock
Individual
Testifying as Opponent

Chair Roegner, Vice-Chair Cirino, Ranking Member Ingram and Members of the Higher Education Committee:

My name is Nicolyn Woodcock, I am from Toledo and I live in Dayton. I am an educator and concerned citizen, and I ask this committee to oppose Senate Bill 1, which will make Ohio colleges and universities less attractive to students both in this state and from beyond it; discourage current students from persisting at their institutions and/or staying in Ohio after graduation; and, ultimately, result in degrees from Ohio's public colleges and universities becoming less valuable and competitive across multiple industries in hiring market.

As I prepared for college graduation, I applied to English master's degree programs at six universities, only two of which were in Ohio, The Ohio State University and Miami University. During my research, I was surprised to find at least three faculty members within the English departments at each who specialized in Asian American Studies topics — I had fully expected I would leave Ohio to pursue this field of study at an institution on the West or East coast. I was overjoyed to receive admission to Miami University for two reasons: at the time, Miami employed one of the foremost experts studying Asian American literature and food culture, who became my advisor; and, most importantly, Miami was incredibly affordable. They offered a graduate teaching assistantship in the composition program that would provide me necessary job skills training and a stipend of just over \$15,000 per year, an amount that would cover living expenses in Oxford without needing to take additional student loans. My other admissions offer, from Northeastern University in Boston, would have required me to incur more than \$40,000 in debt across two years.

The talented faculty in Asian American Studies and affordability also contributed to my decision to *stay* at Miami University for my PhD program although I had competitive offers from two universities outside Ohio. At that time, Miami offered me two scholarships, the Diversity Pathways Assistantship and a fellowship to support my dissertation work in my fourth year. Both contributed to retaining me at Miami across the five year process to completing my dissertation, not only because the fellowship provided time for me to research and write full time for a year, but especially because the Diversity Pathways program provided me with essential support emotional, social, and psychological support through the network faculty mentors, staff, and other students all of whom identified as underrepresented in terms of race, gender, abilities, and/or class, including women in STEM and with roles in the upper administration, first generation college graduates and PhDs, people of color, veterans, and people with disabilities. It was this network that showed me what successfully completing my doctorate could look like, who encouraged me during the hardest semesters of my program, and they helped me navigate the grueling process of applying and interviewing for academic positions and negotiate the transition into my professional career.

This is the work of diversity, equity, and inclusion programs, initiatives, and curriculum at Ohio's public universities: recruiting bright minds to pursue their studies *here* when elsewhere seems like the more likely path; convincing people like me—who grew up feeling out of place as an Asian American in the Midwest—that my experiences matter here and that this is where I belong.

After I graduated from Miami, I worked in Colorado, Massachusetts, and Western New York, places that, arguably, are more diverse and where it was easier to find an Asian American community. Yet, Ohio kept calling. When I was offered an opportunity to come back to Ohio, to work at one of Ohio's public universities, I was most excited to finally feel settled—to *come home* and, I hoped, to stay here. I am proud to be part of a positive support network that recruits, retains, and graduates students from our campus and encourages them to stay, work, build lives here in Ohio. But, in just a few short weeks, since the introduction of SB1, I have previewed the havoc that will come should this legislation succeed: my students and colleagues are afraid; we are angry; and we are unsettled, tired of fighting constantly just to survive. We are looking away from Ohio for opportunities, safety, and security—for our communities, for our livelihoods, for education, and for career prospects—that we expect to lose if SB1 comes to pass. Not yet the law, this bill is already bad for Ohio, as talented educators and students make plans that will, inevitably, take them elsewhere. I can only imagine what follows if this bill succeeds in its destruction of public higher education in Ohio.

I respectfully urge the Senate Higher Education Committee to consider my testimony and to vote NO on SB1. Thank you for your time and the opportunity to testify in the legislation process.

The views expressed in this testimony are mine as an individual; they do not reflect the views of my degree-granting institution or my employer.