

To Whom It May Concern:

2/8/2025

I am writing to express my strong opposition to Senate Bill 1/House Bill 6. I am a professor of English at Sinclair Community College, and I have a doctorate in education. This bill would pose substantial barriers to meeting our mission of: “Find the need and endeavor to meet it by providing high quality, accessible learning as a college of and for the community.” In order to meet this standard and to serve the community, we need to utilize best practices in education, many of which draw from DEI frameworks. In my 25 years as an educator, I have never seen compassionate and ethical stances like valuing diversity or striving for inclusive evidence politicized. In fact, one of my greatest objections to this bill is that it lacks even a basic sense of what diversity, equity, and inclusion mean and, therefore, could be used to punish instructors and institutions for meeting their students’ needs and, in many cases, for following the law. The terms are not operationalized or in alignment with the field of education. To cite but one example, students with disabilities often have documented modifications that instructors need to provide such as a text in Braille. This is a legal obligation, a moral imperative, and DEI. In fact, the word inclusion has roots in special education.

Moreover, we already have practices in place that are superior to those being recommended. Both courts and writings on the First Amendment have already established what is and is not considered academic freedom, and this is often further explicated in faculty handbooks. Students are already permitted to independently search for truth and draw their own conclusions and most colleges, such as Sinclair, already have a system in place for students who believe that they are being discriminated against by an instructor or an institution. Curriculum is developed with extensive checks and balances in place including accountability to accrediting bodies, to those who set professional disciplinary standards, and to an interdisciplinary team that reviews curriculum. It is incredibly ironic that the document banning DEI uses the word “diversity” (eg. “intellectual diversity”) to ban it, especially since academic freedom is already the established phrasing in higher education. The authors of the bill hold an inconsistent stance. For instance, the bill would actually prohibit training on how to better foster intellectual diversity.

Ohio colleges have a proven history of meeting the needs of an incredibly diverse population of students, particularly within community colleges. Our commitment to meeting the needs of all of our students is non-negotiable. It is fiscally responsible, ethical, and in alignment with our mission. Please do your part to keep radical politics out of Ohio’s colleges by opposing this bill.

Sincerely,

Dr. Heather Johnson-Taylor, Professor of English, Sinclair Community College