

**Opponent Testimony for Senate Bill One  
Workforce and Higher Education Committee  
February 11, 2025**

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Private Citizen**

I stand before you today, an honors student pursuing three degrees simultaneously who has spent the last six semesters on Dean's List able to achieve all of this while working bedside 36 hours a week at a local hospital. I also stand here today as a student who failed their first semester. As a student who had to spend their first year at university on probation.

I grew up economically disadvantaged and my family relied on social services to get by. I had to get my first job at 14 and have had to work a full time job since the day I turned 16 just to overcome the barriers the context I grew up in had set up for me. I worked through countless friends' birthday parties. Through football Friday nights. Through prom. I work now full time because if I didn't work I would not have health insurance. I would have nowhere to go at night. There is *no* foundation for me. My entire life has felt defined by a need to constantly keep applying myself, because I wasn't dealt the same cards as some of my peers. And I have overexerted myself just to sit at the table with them.

College was an entirely different beast. I am a first-generation college student. When times got tough, suddenly, my mom didn't know *exactly* what to say to get me out of the holes I had dugged myself into. My brother couldn't give me a speech to inspire me to keep fighting anymore because I couldn't even identify my target. Nobody in my support structure knew how to help me. I didn't know how to handle this new workload. I felt helpless. I felt alone. And, I failed. I failed, *bad*.

It was only at a meeting for first-generation students at my college's inclusion center that I ever felt capable or hard work in my studies again. It was only there that someone helped me identify the next step. So many students have friends or family members who could help them figure out how to *do* college. Nobody in my family has a degree. Nobody from the neighborhood I grew up in was facing this beast alongside me. I *needed* the type of programs that this bill would ban to see me as more than a poor disadvantaged kid from a difficult background. To sit with me and help me figure out the beast that I was facing, because including me and my voice was important enough to their mission.

Proponents of this bill argue that it is a necessary measure to defend merit in higher education, but imagine what a twist of the knife that such a statement is to kids like me who have done nothing but work harder their entire lives. Who are more than willing to work twice as hard as anyone else just so they can get the opportunity they deserve.

Make no mistake: to vote in favor of this bill is to tell the next generation of people like me that this body does not see them. The years of sacrifice and sweat and tears that we have put in is not enough. It will tell us that we do not belong. That the inclusion of our voices does not matter to this body. And make no mistake, when people like me are stripped of that access- we fail, *bad*. But now, now *nobody* will be there for us.

Thank you. I'm happy to answer any questions.