

Chairman, members of the committee, my name is Norman Prokop, and I am a research engineer who was educated and is currently working in Ohio. I strongly oppose Senate Bill 1 because it undermines Ohio's ability to prepare a workforce that can compete in the 21st-century economy.

As a veteran and student, I have used my GI Bill benefits to attend Cuyahoga Community College, Lakeland Community College, and Cleveland State University. I value the education I received in these institutions and see no reason for the state legislature to overreach into higher education.

This bill limits the ability of faculty to foster open discussions in the classroom by imposing vague restrictions on teaching controversial topics. As a student, I wanted to be challenged. I wanted to engage with difficult subjects and hear diverse perspectives. My service in the United States Navy provided me with exposure to other nations, cultures, and citizens from throughout this great country. The diversity I encountered in my service enhanced my life and education. This bill will remove DEI initiatives, which have been instrumental in supporting students from different backgrounds, ensuring that we all have an equal opportunity to succeed. Without these programs, Ohio risks alienating students from underrepresented communities, discouraging them from attending our state's institutions. I fear that this bill will diminish the value of my education, making Ohio universities less competitive nationally. I urge you to reject this bill and prioritize policies that enhance—not restrict—our education.

As a technical leader in my field who often hosts internships, I rely on Ohio's universities to produce graduates with critical thinking skills, global awareness, and the ability to collaborate with diverse teams. The removal of DEI programs and restrictions on teaching so-called "controversial topics" will create a chilling effect on discussions that are essential for preparing students for the complexities of modern industries. Moreover, the proposed changes to tenure and faculty governance will deter talented professors from coming to Ohio, damaging the reputation of our institutions. If we weaken our higher education system, businesses will struggle to find the talent they need, and companies will look elsewhere to establish themselves. This bill is a step backward for Ohio's economic future, and I urge this committee to reject it.