

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

Thank you for allowing me to submit my written testimony today. My name is James L. Felder. I am a resident of Westlake Ohio, and I am strongly opposed to SB 1 and its companion bill HB 6.

I am concerned that the effect of these bills' requirement that state funded colleges and universities to not require students to endorse or express a given ideology, political stance, or view of a social policy will be used as a pretext to insert religious beliefs into courses where religious studies are not the subject of the class. In many fields of study there are in fact right and wrong answers regardless of a student's ideology, political stand or view of social policy.

So, my question is, would this bill require an answer of "6000 years" to be marked as correct to the question "how old is the earth" on a geology test to avoid requiring students to express a given ideology, political stand, or view of social policy? Or in a course in medical schools on vaccines, would answers to test questions coming from an anti-vaccine ideology have to be accepted as correct to avoid forcing an ideology on the student. This would also apply to all scientific and fact-based fields of study, from physics to nursing to accounting.

The bill also takes particular aim at efforts to create an equitable, diverse, and inclusive group of professors, instructors and other personnel that reflects the general population by allowing factors other than a candidate's qualifications be taken into consideration when selecting from a pool of *fully* qualified candidates. In public discourse, a "DEI hire" has become a pejorative term for any person hired for any position who is not white, not male, and very often not Christian. Such persons are viewed as obviously having been hired for reasons having nothing to do with their qualifications and so are assumed to have taken the job from a better qualified white Christian man. In this environment of broad public hostility, my concern is that an institution that did hire the objectively best qualified candidate who just happened to be a black, Islamic woman, for example, would be accused of still practicing "DEI". This charge would be even more likely to be made if one of the other candidates in the pool was a qualified, but not as well qualified, white male. Basically colleges and universities will be forced to practice anti-"DEI" just to prove they aren't guilty of trying to still quietly practice "DEI".

Lastly, I am concerned about the required American Civics class. Given the abysmal level of knowledge of civics in those who should have received in high school a firm grounding in the Constitution, history, structures, and laws that are embodied in our American democracy, I have no issue with a required remedial course at the college level, though I would hope that those who did receive the necessary education at the high school level would be allowed to test out. My concern is whether this course will teach a full and objective history of our country, its institutions and economic system, or whether it will become a hagiography to American Exceptionalism. I would hope that this course would be created by the best historians based on peer reviewed research into the political and economic history of this country and be presented, warts and all. But there is nothing in the bill that gives me confidence that it will be.

Given that the current bill does not offer specific language addressing these major issues for potential abuse of this otherwise laudable bill, I cannot support its passage in its current form.