

2/9/2025

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

I am submitting my written testimony for your consideration. My name is Kathryn Feltey and I live in Akron, Ohio. I have a long history with higher education in Ohio: I earned my B.A. and M.A. from Wright State University and my Ph.D. from The Ohio State University. From there I held a faculty position at the University of Akron from 1988 until my retirement in 2020. I continued to teach after retirement, filling in for a colleague who passed away during the pandemic. I am strongly opposed to SB1 and its companion bill HB 6. (I do want to qualify my opposition to state that an annual educational program for trustees is not a bad idea. Boards are often made up of people who are not familiar with education other than their own and would benefit from learning more about educational theories and practices across the disciplines).

Given my extensive history and deep experience in three Ohio institutions of higher education, I can state with certainty that SB 1 and its companion bill HB 6 will negatively affect the quality of education provided by these institutions. Ohio has been a leader in higher education in the nation with universities throughout the state and branch campuses in smaller communities to provide access for nonurban residents. Serving diverse populations has always been important in Ohio as witnessed by the extensive tunnel system at Wright State University (Dayton campus) that make it one of the most accessible colleges for people with disabilities in the country.

Students who have different learning styles and/or learning challenges have been a focus of student services and teaching faculty across Ohio universities. First-generation college students have also been a focus as staff and faculty have designed programs to respond to the unique challenges for this diverse population. There is extensive research on the experiences of “first-gen” students documenting the ways they can best achieve success in furthering their education. There is also extensive research on the opportunities for upward mobility through higher education. Indeed, part of the American Dream is that our children will be upwardly mobile, using education to contribute in significant ways to a healthy, vibrant society.

It is sad that “DEI” has become shorthand for a political agenda that does not in fact reflect the reality of higher education. It is tragic that Ohio would even consider legislating curriculum content and day-to-day departmental practices, and instituting panopticism in higher education. I ask you to consider these points and to vote NO on this extremist bill.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify.