

Testimony of Erynn M. Casanova, Ph.D.  
Before the Ohio Senate Higher Education Committee  
Senator Kristina Roegner, Chair

2/10/2025

Dear Senators:

My name is Erynn Casanova and I have been a faculty member at the University of Cincinnati since 2009, when I moved to Ohio for this job. I am currently the head of the award-winning Department of Sociology and was just named Distinguished Research Professor. I do not represent the University of Cincinnati, but rather am submitting testimony as a private citizen IN OPPOSITION TO SB 1.

I have many concerns related to this bill: for example, how much more difficult it will make recruiting and retaining talented faculty and students (this brain drain phenomenon is already happening in states with similar laws, like Florida). As a sociologist, I know that there is empirical evidence that intentional DEI policies help create better workplaces and schools. Research also shows that diverse teams make for better science and better outcomes.<sup>1</sup>

But here I will focus on the potential impact of this bill to my students and my co-workers.

- 1) My classroom and those of my colleagues are already spaces for open inquiry and debate; our students learn best through dialogue and exposure to multiple scientific perspectives. The prohibitions this bill introduces on ill-defined concepts such as DEI and “controversial” issues will have a chilling effect on this free inquiry and indeed, on free speech in the classroom and on campus generally. My colleagues

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example:

Hofstra, B., Kulkarni, V.K., Muñoz-Najar Galvez, S., He, B., Jurafsky, D. and McFarland, D.A. 2020. “The Diversity-Innovation Paradox in Science.” PNAS 117(17):9284-9291.

Maroulis, S., Diermeier, D. and Nisar, M.A. 2020. “Discovery, dissemination, and information diversity in networked groups.” Social Networks 61:67-77.

Page, S.E. 2018. The Difference: How the Power of Diversity Creates Better Groups, Firms, Schools, and Society. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Watson, W.E., Johnson, L. and Zgourides, G.D. 2002. “The influence of ethnic diversity on leadership, group process, and performance: an examination of learning teams.” International Journal of Intercultural Relations 26:1-16.

and I in particular would be **targeted for doing our jobs**, since sociology aims to understand some of the most complex social problems, including poverty, violence, and addiction. If we want the next generation of Ohioans to devise solutions to these problems, they need to learn to consider them from a variety of angles in our classes.

- 2) Already-marginalized students and other community members would be harmed by the dismantling of DEI programs, scholarships, and affinity groups. **We want to create a campus environment where everyone feels valued and respected** for who they are, and where there are mechanisms in place for supporting those who experience disadvantage in the broader society. What message does axing DEI send to women, people of color, LGBT, and international students and staff? That they don't belong on campus.
- 3) This bill will worsen working conditions for faculty by eroding tenure and undermining collective bargaining, two ways that our academic freedom is protected. What is academic freedom? It is what allows us to engage in teaching and research about sensitive topics while protecting us from capricious firing by politically-motivated authorities. We will become a state that brilliant academics (and students who want to learn from them) avoid at all costs. **Ohio's currently world-class university system will no longer be respected or impactful.**
- 4) Making individual course syllabi publicly available, in addition to threatening faculty's intellectual property rights, puts us and our students in physical danger. **No one can teach or learn in a space that they feel is unsafe.** Prior to this bill, my department's faculty have already received death threats and other threatening communications from the public. This bill would put us in further danger. We became professors because we love to learn, conduct research, and teach. Our job should not be one in which our lives are at risk every day.

Thank you for this opportunity to comment on proposed legislation that would be truly disastrous to higher education in the state.