

Testimony for Senate Bill 1
Submitted by: Aaron Wagner
Organization: N/A
Testifying as Opponent

Chair Roegner, Vice-Chair Cirino, Ranking Member Ingram and Members of the Higher Education Committee

My name is Aaron Wagner, I live in Oakwood, OH. I have learned about the potential outcomes if this bill is passed and ask that this committee stand in opposition of Senate Bill 1.

I am the child of a German-English father and a Korean mother and I grew up in Northwest Ohio without much interaction with other Asian people other than my family. The consequence of growing up in an area that lacked diversity and education about it, I experienced many microaggressions that shaped the way I navigated the world and interacted with it. While a lot of these moments helped strengthen and build my character, more often I felt alone in educating the whole community about life outside our small-town bubble in the Midwest.

Attending The Ohio State University, I was able to build community with other half-Asians who'd grown up in the Midwest with similar experiences. Notably, upperclassmen seemed to have more grace in navigating conversations with people from diverse backgrounds, trading questions like "Where are you from?" or "What are you?" for more tactful ones like, "What is your background?" or "What is your culture?" I credit programs at Ohio State that incorporate learning about the world as a whole from many perspectives. The thorough conversations that we had about right or wrong from varied perspectives helped me build capacity to empathize with those with different experiences, beliefs, and views from my own. These educational opportunities prepared me to effectively navigate workplaces including Starbucks, Apple, Abercrombie & Fitch Corporate, Titan International, and the world beyond.

With just those few points, if even disregarding any emotional or mental impact, keeping diversity, equity, and inclusion studies and protecting their place in the education system would benefit the nation by better arming people with perspectives and language to interact with each other with more tolerance, patience, and understanding.

Should SB1 pass, a number of great resources—both people and information—will no longer be available to Ohio's students, both faculty whose teaching diversifies the curriculum and support professionals who help all students navigate campus physically, emotionally, and mentally. Students need diverse settings to learn as much as they can about our globally connected world, where interacting with people in other countries happens as easily as conversing with neighbors. Stripping diversity, equity, and inclusion from Ohio's public universities will constrain graduates with limited perspectives, a surefire way to ensure they will be viewed as narrow-minded or uneducated—which may lead students to seek educational opportunities outside Ohio.

With that, I respectfully urge the Senate Higher Education Committee to consider my testimony and to vote NO on SB1. Thank you for your time and the opportunity to participate in the legislative process.

**Views expressed in this testimony are my own and do not reflect the views of my degree-granting institution or any past or present employers.*