

Feb 7, 2025

The Honorable Kristina D. Roeger, Chairwoman
Senate Higher Education Committee, Ohio Senate
1 Capitol Square
Columbus, OH 43215

Thank you for this opportunity to provide written opposition testimony on Senate Bill 1: the Advance Ohio Higher Education Act.

My name is Audrey Costanzo and I am a graduate student and aspiring College Student Affairs professional at Bowling Green State University. I write today on my own behalf and not as a representative of my university.

Senate Bill 1 is of interest to me because of its potential massively negative impact on college students, as well as the universities' staff and faculty who have dedicated their lives to the support and care of our students. Higher education institutions positively transform individual lives, the communities in which they are situated, and the society that bolsters their missions. SB 1 would impede higher education institutions from being able to harness the transformative power that creates the leaders of tomorrow.

The language I find most troubling is the numerous unfunded mandates that are throughout the bill that would require universities to foot the cost of these proposed changes. Particularly the language requiring universities to investigate and respond to all claims of violations of prohibitions related to litmus tests (pg. 25), diversity statements (pg. 25), speakers (pgs. 25-26), interferences with intellectual diversity (pgs. 24-27), controversial beliefs (pgs. 21-24), as well as accounting in costs related to DEI (pg. 40-41). SB 1 does not fund these added expenditures to the universities. Given that state funding for higher education, specifically community colleges, has been decreasing steadily since 2008 (Hillstrom, 2020), and the fact that the cost of college is a leading determining factor of if a student attends college (Hillstrom, 2020) SB 1 is putting even more financial strain on public universities and that strain will be coming out of Ohio students' pockets.

SB 1 is also full of intentional and malicious lies about DEI, and does not define any language relating to "DEI" in the bill. Given that there is not one widely accepted definition for "DEI" outside of it being an acronym that simply means "Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion", SB 1 plays into the lies being perpetrated about a framework that simply ensures that people are treated fairly and have the opportunity to participate fully. SB 1 claims that it is attempting to do exactly that through truth seeking and protection of intellectual diversity, but you cannot ensure fair

treatment and unimpeded participation without DEI principles. SB 1 contradicts itself when it comes to principles of protection.

SB 1 is an insult to the employees of these public higher education institutions who have dedicated their lives and careers to the aid of the students who attend these schools. I have witnessed my colleagues who are parents miss precious time with their young children because they are working late hours to support their students. I have witnessed professor colleagues reply to student emails at three in the morning because a student panicked about an assignment and needed support. I have witnessed my colleagues put a pause on their personal life to pursue degrees in student development theory and higher education so they can better understand and support their students. I have witnessed these people give everything for their students and the institutions they serve. It is because of that dedication from both faculty and staff that students can have a truly transformational experience in college and become the leaders they have been working so hard to be.

These people are doing the real work every day. They work with students every day. They have degrees, like mine, specifically to work with students. They are the experts. Trust that the experts are doing everything they can for their students. They always have.

In conclusion, I implore you to oppose SB 1. I appreciate your consideration of these concerns and strongly encourage you to vote accordingly.

Thank you,
Audrey Costanzo
Graduate Students at Bowling Green State University

References

Laurie Collier Hillstrom. (2020). *The College Affordability Crisis*. ABC-CLIO.