

Testimony of Heather Strohschein, Ph.D
Before the Senate Higher Education Committee
Senator Kristina Roegner, Chair
February 2, 2025

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

My name is Heather Strohschein, and I am a professor of ethnomusicology at Bowling Green State University and at Owens Community College, where I have taught as an adjunct for over fifteen years. I do not represent Bowling Green State University or Owens Community College, but rather am submitting testimony as a private citizen in opposition to Senate Bill 1. To provide a bit more context to my credentials: I finished my undergraduate degree at BGSU, received a masters degree from that same institution, obtained a PhD from the University of Hawaii at Manoa, and then returned to Ohio to teach. Over the past 20+ years, I have taught at BGSU Firelands, Tiffin University, Owens Community College, and BGSU. I have seen Ohio higher education grow and change from multiple perspectives.

I see one major issue with abolishing DEI, and that is cutting off lines of inquiry and knowledge for our students. University is a place for students to interact and experiment with new ideas. Many American students are meeting international students for the first time. Some international students are meeting Americans for the first time. Students from large metropolitan areas learn from small-town students and vice versa. Our job as educators at American institutions of high learning has never been indoctrination. Our job is to guide, facilitate, challenge, and mentor. We cannot do that if our students live in fear of speaking up.

Indeed, this whole debate honestly sounds like the attack on affirmative action all over again. Why are we trying to institute “diversity of thought” which seems just vague enough to please everybody and nobody?

In my music area studies class, I teach students about musical traditions and culture from the Pacific. For example, they learn how the US nuclear testing in the Marshall Islands has had a grave effect on people’s voice and therefore their ability to sing. Because of how abysmal their US history education has been, I cannot teach only music. I teach them about what US (and other countries’) scientists hoped to learn from that testing. I teach them about the results of radioactive fallout on Marshallese health, culture, and safety. I teach them how the US government responded to Marshallese complaints. I teach them about the ongoing relationship between the United States and the Marshall Islands. I do this, as a musician, because they don’t learn this in their history classes. I present them with the US side of things and the Marshallese side of things. We discuss why these things happened the way they did. We analyze ongoing American and Marshallese history and culture. My students grow from knowing this history. They want to understand and work to make things right. We, as educators and leaders, should model the hard decisions and harsh realities of American history and interaction with the world. This is what makes us strong.

I ask you to consider my testimony and vote NO on this bill.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify.

Heather Strohschein, PhD