

Testimony of Tasha Perdue, Ph.D.  
Before the Senate Higher Education Committee  
Senator Kristina Roegner Chair  
February 10, 2025

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

My name is Tasha Perdue, and I am an assistant professor in the John Glenn College of Public Affairs at The Ohio State University. While I do not represent the university in this testimony, I am speaking as a private citizen in strong opposition to Senate Bill 1, which seeks to eliminate diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives in higher education. If passed, this bill would remove essential support systems for students from underrepresented backgrounds, making it harder for them to succeed and limiting the overall quality of Ohio's higher education system.

As a white woman and first-generation student from a working-class family in rural Ohio, I have personally benefited from initiatives designed to support students like me. My mother did not graduate from high school, but she instilled in me the importance of education and hard work. Despite my determination, systemic barriers would have made success far more difficult without scholarships, mentorship, and programs specifically targeting first-generation students. These initiatives not only helped me earn a PhD but also allowed me to move from the working class to the middle class.

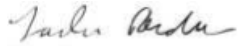
Research shows that students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds face significant barriers in higher education compared to their higher-income peers (Jack, 2019; Armstrong & Hamilton, 2015). Additionally, first-generation students remain severely underrepresented in tenure-track faculty positions (Morgan et al., 2022). DEI initiatives provide critical resources, including academic support, mentoring, and access to networks that help these students overcome challenges, thereby improving their chances for success and long-term career advancement.

Some proponents of Senate Bill 1 argue that DEI programs promote division or ideological conformity. However, research shows the opposite—that diverse classrooms enhance critical thinking, creativity, and innovation (Gurin et al., 2002). For instance, studies have shown that diverse teams are more effective at solving complex, real-world problems. In my own classroom, when inclusivity is prioritized, students feel more engaged and open to diverse perspectives. DEI does not dictate what students should think but rather creates an environment where all students, regardless of background, can thrive, learn from one another, and contribute meaningfully to the academic community.

If passed, Senate Bill 1 would actively worsen educational inequities by dismantling programs that help underrepresented students succeed. It would limit access to efforts designed to diversify academia and create equal opportunities for students of all races, ethnicities, genders, gender identities, sexual orientations, ages, religions, political beliefs, abilities, veteran status, and socioeconomic backgrounds. This is not just a matter of fairness—it is about ensuring that Ohio remains competitive in an increasingly diverse and globalized workforce.

In sum, Senate Bill 1 would weaken Ohio's higher education system by eliminating programs that provide critical support to underrepresented students. This bill would widen educational disparities, stifle innovation, and make it harder for Ohio's universities to attract diverse talent. Instead of dismantling DEI initiatives, I urge this committee to support policies that strengthen, rather than undermine, Ohio's higher education system by ensuring that all students, regardless of background, have the resources they need to succeed.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Tasha Perdue".

Tasha Perdue