

Testimony to the Ohio Senate Higher Education  
Committee on SB 1  
Ariel Miller, Cincinnati, Ohio

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

Thank you for allowing me to testify today. My name is Ariel Miller. I am writing to you as a 72-year-old white Christian voter who has been striving since high school to apply my faith and work through our country's civic institutions to advance dignity and equal opportunity for all Americans. This is about integrity: walking the talk of my faith and of the civic values I hope you share.

SB 1 undermines that integrity by blocking our public universities from teaching honestly about the impact of our systems and history on minority groups. This is like telling medical faculty that they can't teach students about the symptoms and causes of diseases. Suppressing facts doesn't change those facts: it instead cheats students of the knowledge they need to heal them. The same applies to the bill's listing climate change - humanity's most urgent existential threat - as a "controversial topic."

A responsible doctor gives the patient the diagnosis and the evidence for it, even if that diagnosis is difficult and stressful. This fact-based honesty is part of the trust between doctor and patient and important to their partnership in healing.

Racism is alive and terrifyingly real in Ohio. Yesterday, I stood on the I-75 overpass between Evendale and Lincoln Heights with hundreds of Lincoln Heights clergy and citizens and many friends from nearby Episcopal congregations. They came together for a prayer rally following the shock and trauma they are suffering because of the Friday demonstration on that overpass by swastika-festooned, masked Neo-Nazis, several carrying semi-automatic weapons.

The Neo-Nazis brandished flags on the overpass towards Lincoln Heights - a historic Black municipality - proclaiming that America is for white people. This happened shortly before children were dismissed from Lincoln Heights Elementary just up the hill. My friend, principal Dawn Crooks Bailey, rapidly organized a change in the bus routes so the children would not see this terrorism. Other friends, including the executive director of an Episcopal youth center in Lincoln Heights, rushed to the overpass to bravely confront the demonstrators. Thanks be to God, none of them was shot! Lincoln Heights Village Council is holding an emergency town hall meeting this afternoon, Feb. 10.

In 2020, the Ohio School Board reviewed data from over 700 school districts showing a pattern of systemic racial inequity. The School Board passed a resolution to work to overcome this. Leaders in Ohio Legislature pressured the Board to rescind the resolution. **We have work to do, and it's crucial for white Ohioans - including all of you**

**entrusted with elected office - to listen to and heed the experience of Ohioans from minority groups.** Ohio students who will serve as teachers, lawyers, social workers, judges, and the Ohio General Assembly need to build the intellectual integrity and skills to diagnose inequity and to repair it.

My Christian upbringing gave me the gift of confession. This is the spiritual discipline of examining my actions, measuring them against the moral requirements of my faith (especially the Biblical command to love my neighbor as myself), and repenting. That means committing to stop my harmful behavior and working to follow through on that commitment. It is incredibly refreshing to be given this weekly opportunity to find a more loving path: the chance to live with increasing integrity. Episcopalians renew their Baptismal vows several times a year, committing to seek and serve Christ in all people, love our neighbors as ourselves. We commit to strive for justice and peace among all people, respecting the dignity of every human being (*Book of Common Prayer*, p. 305). These are not just words: we're supposed to put them into action, with God's help.

Similarly, our civic life's best chance for integrity and health comes when we can freely examine our political and economic behavior in the light of the values and promises expressed in the Declaration of Independence, which you include as required reading in the bill's American Civic Literacy section: "We hold these truths to be self-evident - that all men are created equal...with certain inalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness. -- That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed."

**Please stop SB 1, which treats those who want to heal racism as the problem, not the reality of racism itself.** You are on the right track in including Dr. Martin Luther King's "Letter from a Birmingham Jail" in the required reading. He responds to eight white religious leaders who criticized the nonviolent demonstrations against egregious racial injustice in Birmingham. "You deplore the demonstrations taking place in Birmingham. But your statement, I am sorry to say, fails to express a similar concern for the conditions that brought about the demonstrations. I am sure that none of you would want to rest content with the superficial kind of social analysis that deals merely with effects and does not grapple with underlying causes. It is unfortunate that demonstrations are taking place in Birmingham, but it is even more unfortunate that the city's white power structure left the Negro community with no alternative." Dr. King goes on to document the facts with blazing clarity.

I ask you to consider my testimony and vote NO on SB 1.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify.

Yours,

Ariel Miller, Cincinnati, Ohio