

Dear Senator Roegner, Senator Cirino, and members of the Committee,

I write today representing myself to oppose Senate Bill 1, a bill similar to a previous bill I also opposed, SB83. While I recognize that the climate of this country has changed since the inauguration and that opposition to DEI and the upending of institutions, including institutions of higher education, is the focus of the new administration and this Ohio administration, I want to add my voice to those who oppose this bill for important reasons.

I teach in the Department of Africana Studies at Kent State. This department has existed since 1968 when African American students on Kent State's campus and across the country protested the lack of available resources and academic courses that reflected their lived experiences and the experiences of their ancestors. The courses we currently offer are open to ALL students and, in fact, our student population is quite diverse – both demographically and ideologically. That said, in the language of SB 1 Section 3345.0217 D “Nothing in this section prohibits faculty or students from classroom instruction, discussion, or debate SO LONG AS FACULTY MEMBERS REMAIN COMMITTED TO EXPRESSING INTELLECTUAL DIVERSITY AND ALLOWING INTELLECTUAL DIVERSITY TO BE EXPRESSED. “Intellectual diversity” is defined in Sec. 3345.0217 (2) is defined as “multiple, divergent, and varied perspectives on an extensive range of public policy issues”. With this language, I am free to teach about the enslavement of People of African descent, but if a student were to suggest that enslavement was ‘not all bad’ or that many enslaved people were ‘happy to be in this position’ or that they were not really enslaved but were ‘workers’, I would need to validate that false belief as a ‘divergent perspective’ when it is historically inaccurate. As we can see, the idea that ‘all ideas are valid’ is inherently false if those ideas are predicated on falsehoods. Denying the Holocaust occurred, denying that 9/11 occurred, denying that Sandy Hook occurred – these are not based on facts and allowing the proliferation of these false beliefs is NOT encouraging critical thinking – it is encouraging misinformation which is antithetical to critical thinking.

I would also like to address the entire premise of this bill – the foundation of this committees’ argument that we NEED to have these constraints because higher education is ‘too woke’.

- (1) The term ‘woke’ is a term that has been appropriated from the African American community and then misused against that community as well as other communities of color. To be ‘woke’ is not a pejorative even though it is now being misused that way. It means ENLIGHTENED, AWARE, THOUGHTFUL especially about issues that are typically NOT part of someone’s lived experience. So, the first problem we have is you are encouraging the antithesis of what higher education is meant to do. It is MEANT to teach students to reason, to hear diverse opinions to help formulate their own, to experience the views of people whose lives have differed significantly from their own either because of time, geography, gender, race, religion or sexual orientation. The ‘anti-woke’ view of education is to narrow ALL of these experiences because of the risk that some students will learn that other people do not live as they do, do not see life as they do, have a different history from theirs. People cannot develop critical thinking if all they are permitted to hear are ideas that reflect only their own lived experience and understanding of life. It isn’t considered too ‘woke’ to listen to Mozart even though he is

from a different country, a different time, and a different culture, with a different political agenda; however, listening to reggae can be considered too 'woke' for the same reasons.

- (2) I would like to address the anti-DEI view embedded in this bill. I would appreciate if members of this committee could articulate ONE idea/issue/element of history/policy/program that disadvantages people because it has 'diversity' in it. Name the program and explain how that program is ineffective, damaging, destructive because it wants to include ideas, voices, faces, and cultures that are not all the same? What is the OPPOSITE of diversity? Senator Roegner, would YOU have this position if it were not for adding the 'diverse' voices of women to the senate? Diversity is what helped you arrive at this point. Previously, the view was that women should stay home, had no new ideas, certainly were not in any way comparable to men and that they had not earned their right to a seat at the table. So, you are here because of 'diversity' AND 'equity' AND 'inclusion' yet you are sponsoring a bill that wants to eliminate these options for the next generations in Ohio.
- (3) I would like to address the notion of a DEI hire. This suggests that a Person of Color, a transgender person, a Muslim is UNQUALIFIED for the position for which they are hired, yet the OPPOSITE conclusion arises when the person in the chair is a white male. We ALWAYS assume their hiring was on merit and not for something else. But we all know that is not true. One only need look at the first Trump administration to realize that Jarrod Kushner did not EARN his job - -he was related to the president – the same as his wife – the president's daughter. We can look at the president's own history; he did not earn his ability to spend money on big construction projects. His father gave him the money – he inherited wealth and power yet we assume he is a great businessman. My point is that if you say that you support 'merit' on one hand but support nepotism or legacy admissions on the other, you appear to be hypocritical at best.

For people who do not have those benefits, the ONLY thing a DEI policy does is allow them ACCESS to the position. It doesn't 'give' it to them; it allows them the opportunity they would otherwise have been denied. One need only look at yesterday's Super Bowl game to validate my position. Both quarterbacks are African American. Today, we have MANY African American quarterbacks in the NFL. Fifty years ago, there were fewer than five. Why? Because most were not even considered for the position as the BELIEF was that they could not handle the skill required to be a quarterback at the NFL level. Based on yesterday's game, that seems like a false premise, doesn't it? But had it not been for a shift in views that said 'let's give these guys a chance because they may actually be good at this', we would still be viewing games were almost all quarterbacks (and coaches for that matter) are white. THAT is all 'DEI' does; it expands the pool of qualified candidates – QUALIFIED candidates.

My last point of consideration is the goal of this bill to break unions by preventing unions from striking. If you have had any experience in unions going on strike, this NEVER happens with a simple grievance. This happens after many failed attempts at a resolution AND a majority vote of membership. Removing the ability to strike is an anti-union measure. Unionizing allows faculty to bargain for their membership so that everyone can benefit from the negotiations with

administration. Trying to undermine this process seems, frankly, un-American if you look at the history of this country and its labor force.

Thank you for your time and consideration of these ideas.

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