

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 D'Andre Person, I am a third-year Journalism and Sociology double major who studies at Otterbein University, a private school in Westerville. I am strongly opposed to SB 1 and its companion bill HB 6.

Since my second year of being a college student, I have been a Diversity Ambassador for my university. A program organized by students who are highly involved on campus that reaches out to high school students in the Columbus-area and helps them connect to resources and prepare them for their transition to college.

The students I work with are often low-income, Black, Asian, Muslim, Latino, or first-generation students who have never considered attending university until we arrive at their schools and show them that they have a future in higher education. Typically, these students have reservations about committing to higher education because they feel that these campuses do not welcome them. They do not see people like themselves in the students and they do not believe these universities acknowledge the barriers they face to attaining their degree.

As a Diversity Ambassador, I demonstrate the way these barriers can be overcome. Whether it is connecting low-income students to grants and scholarships, finding organizations on campus for our Black, Asian, and Latino students, showing our Muslim student both the interfaith group and prayer space on campus. Once these students feel seen and heard by these institutions, we see a rise in enrollments, excitement about higher education as well as an increase in diversity in thought and ideas since people from all backgrounds feel safe enough to enter the classroom rather than the select, elite few who have the resources to get to university.

SB1 and its companion bill HB 6 threaten the future of these students in a vindictive and malicious manner that will only result in creating another barrier towards higher education and stifling the intellectual diversity the bill claims to promote. The bans on DEI proposed by these bills will eliminate programs like mine in public institutions, which will consequently disenfranchise these students who would otherwise go on to be successful college students, academics, and workers. This bill does not impact private schools, but it is crucial that both private and public institutions provide resources for these students, or we will rob these students of a way to enrich their lives with education and opportunity. Equal opportunity is a value that we preach about as Americans but one that is under attack because of this bill.

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

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify