

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in opposition to Ohio Senate Bill 1. My name is Fatou Toure, I am a student at Ohio State University studying Political Science and Economics, and I am here today to express deep concerns about the proposed legislation that seeks to limit or eliminate Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) programs within our public institutions, especially in higher education.

I want to emphasize what DEI is not. DEI programs are not about favoring specific groups; rather, they are about creating environments where every individual has the opportunity to succeed, regardless of their background. I was not admitted into this university for anything other than my merit and accomplishments. Perpetuating the idea that people are getting ahead just because of their marginalized background is extremely detrimental. It undermines the hard work and qualifications of individuals from underrepresented groups.

These programs are meant to foster collaboration and innovation amongst people, which are skills that are needed in the workforce. Examples of DEI programs include mentorship programs for first-generation college students to support academic success, inclusive curriculum initiatives that ensure diverse perspectives are represented in course materials, and student resource centers that provide support and advocacy for underrepresented groups on campus.

Furthermore, DEI initiatives can improve the educational environment through faculty development. Professors should be trained on how to make their students feel included, fostering classrooms where diverse voices are heard and respected. Training on topics like microaggressions, which can inadvertently harm students' self-esteem and sense of belonging, is essential for creating supportive academic spaces. Inclusive teaching practices not only benefit marginalized students but also enhance learning outcomes for all. Eliminating DEI programs risks reversing progress made in addressing systemic inequalities that have historically marginalized certain groups.

DEI efforts are also crucial for Ohio's workforce development because they are drivers of economic growth and competitiveness.

By dismantling DEI initiatives in our educational institutions, we risk graduating students who are less prepared to thrive in and contribute to such environments. This bill could also negatively impact Ohio's reputation, making it less attractive to prospective students, faculty, and businesses who value diversity and inclusion as fundamental principles. In a competitive global landscape, policies that hinder inclusivity may deter talent and economic investment from our state. I decided to come to Ohio State because of the opportunities to meet people similar to me. I was part of the Morrill Scholars early arrival program which allowed me to make friends as an out-of-state student.

In addition, Ohio Senate Bill 1 poses a significant threat to free speech and academic freedom. By restricting DEI programs and related discussions, the bill limits the open exchange of ideas that is essential to higher education and democratic society. Universities are meant to be spaces where diverse perspectives can be debated without fear of censorship. This legislation could

create a chilling effect, discouraging students, educators, and administrators from engaging in critical conversations about race, equity, and social justice out of concern for potential legal or institutional repercussions.

In conclusion, Ohio Senate Bill 1 threatens free speech and academic freedom which have long been democratic values. I urge you to reconsider this legislation.

Thank you for your time and consideration.