

OHIO SB 1 TESTIMONY

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 Dr. Catherine Cutcher. I am strongly opposed to SB 1 and its companion bill HB 6. I am a constituent from Rutland, Ohio. I am a mother and a concerned citizen. Incidentally, I am also an administrator and professor at a public university in Ohio. I represent my own views here as a private citizen and I do not speak on behalf of my institution.

We are analyzing Ohio Senate Bill 1 in the classes I teach. This is an attack on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) in higher education. I have also been studying SB 83, the predecessor to SB 1, for the last two years with my students. SB 83 was defeated in the last legislative session, facing major opposition and multiple revisions. Now they have just brought back the original version of the bill for a new legislative session. Anti-DEI legislation has already been passed in Texas and Florida and at least 10 other states around the country. The effects of these bills have been disastrous to our colleagues and students in other states. Please don't approve this harmful legislation in Ohio.

DEI is intended to correct inequities within organizations, including schools, companies, and other institutions. DEI practices have their roots in the Civil Rights Act, Americans with Disabilities Act, Age Discrimination in Employment Act, and other civil rights laws. Every DEI program may be different, but they are "aimed at addressing exclusionary practices concerning race, age, gender, sexual orientation, veteran status, disability, economic class, and more." This could include "implementing accessibility measures for people with disabilities, correcting exclusive and discriminatory hiring practices, addressing racial and gender pay inequities, training professionals to confront their implicit biases, and more." (Alfonseca, 2024)

What exactly is the GOP trying to conserve with SB 1? They promote "intellectual diversity" but constrain the intellectual capacity, freedom, and expertise of university students, faculty, and administrators. The sponsors of this bill have targeted a full-scale assault on diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI), climate change, the Green New Deal, "Marxist equity," "gender ideology," "wokeness," and higher education itself. They want to curtail faculty research, teaching, and academic freedom. By opposing Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, they are promoting Conformity, Inequity, and Exclusion. They are limiting freedom of speech and promoting censorship, which violates the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution. They are trying to roll back the progress we have made over decades of educational reform to make our curriculum more responsive to and inclusive of an evolving world. They want to Make America Dumb Again.

SB 1 defines “controversial belief or policy” as “any belief or policy that is the subject of political controversy, including issues such as climate policies, electoral politics, foreign policy, diversity, equity, and inclusion programs, immigration policy, marriage, or abortion.” The bill would require “institutions to affirm and declare that faculty and staff will allow students to reach their own conclusions about such topics and will not attempt to indoctrinate any social, political, or religious view.” (Ohio Senate Bill 1)

The students and faculty are very concerned about what this means. University faculty members have vast experience in teaching about controversial subjects and facilitating difficult dialogues about divisive topics. SB 1 produces a chilling effect in our classrooms. For instance, if a student believes the earth is flat, or gravity doesn’t exist, or Pluto is a planet, then the faculty would not be allowed to contradict that, but to “present evidence of other perspectives.” The same goes for evolution, vaccines, public health, climate change, reproductive rights, abortion, marriage, racism, sex and gender, LGBTQ rights, immigration, social and environmental justice, or anything deemed to be “controversial.” It’s a postmodern crisis!

Also, the bill would not allow faculty to strike or collectively bargain in unions. Tenure is under scrutiny. Research and exchange partnerships with Chinese institutions would be banned. Any DEI programs or trainings or hiring practices would be eliminated, and we would not be allowed to develop diversity statements. Boards of Trustees would be required to attend mandatory training (but not DEI) and their terms would be reduced. It goes on and on....

I ask you to consider my testimony and vote NO on this extremist, discriminatory, and harmful bill.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify.

Sincerely,



Catherine Cutcher, Ph.D.
33520 Township Road 447
Rutland, OH 45775

Reference:

Alfonseca, Kiara. (April 5, 2024). Map: The Impact of anti-DEI Legislation. ABC News. <https://abcnews.go.com/US/map-impact-anti-dei-legislation/story?id=108795967>