

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

My name is Isabella Richardson and I am a recent Environmental Engineering Graduate from The Ohio State University (Dec 2024). I am strongly opposed to SB 1. There are several classes I took in my undergraduate career that taught me important things and even promoted the sharing of differing beliefs. In one of my favorite classes, Global Environment in Planning, in the Knowlton School of city and regional planning – students discussed important topics from how to distribute resources, the role of the city government in planning, and how cultural differences influence the built environment. People in the class came from many backgrounds and beliefs from the right and left sides of the political spectrum. The intellectual discussions this bill claims to support are already happening. Supporters of the bill claim that it promotes intellectual diversity and freedom of speech; however, the language of the bill describes the opposite.

The bill states “that faculty and staff shall allow and encourage students to reach their own conclusions about all controversial beliefs or policies and shall not seek to indoctrinate any social, political, or religious point of view” (sec 2245.0217, pg 24, lines 671 – 672). This seems fine enough, except that indoctrination is not happening. In the class I mentioned our professor laid out the facts, from historical context to events and students came to their own conclusions. By describing “controversial belief or policy” as broadly as “belief or policy that is subject to political controversy including ... climate policies, electoral politics, foreign policy, diversity, equity, and inclusion programs, immigration policy, marriage, or abortion” I fear professors will shy away from such important conversations because if describing facts and things as they are is considered indoctrination, I don’t know what won’t. We cannot move forward by ignoring conversations and discussions about uncomfortable topics. That is how we allow a chasm to form between people of differing beliefs.

As an environmental engineering major we have to talk about climate change. Like it or not, but the increasing instability in our climate has drastic consequences on our infrastructure. The increasing frequency of natural disasters has direct economic impact, and as engineers we must plan for that. NOAA has been in the decades long process of determining the new rainfall intensity for each area due to such instability. If engineers don’t learn about this or are allowed to ignore the facts because they don’t like it, we will be less prepared for floods and droughts. If engineers are not allowed these things in their education prospective students will be forced to consider other universities outside the state. Rather than promoting intellectual diversity this bill would become a ‘brain drain’ on the state.

Finally, the bill claims to support meritocracy by prohibiting any and all diversity initiatives. DEI initiatives have gotten a lot of flack in recent days and I believe that is because of a fundamental misunderstanding of how they work. When studying history you learn that there are numerous road-blocks on certain groups. Redlining is but one example where certain groups have been blocked from accruing generational wealth. While working a few hours a week improves student performance, it is no secret that working long hours (20 hrs/ week or more) do worse in school on average. Thus, students who need to work to pay for school are disadvantaged. Thus, initiatives and scholarships can help level the playing field for these students. Not only does this support historically disadvantaged groups but it also promotes a more diverse workforce. This leads to greater creativity and problem solving. Additionally, there is a false belief that DEI initiatives allow unqualified people to be accepted, instead it makes sure

that qualified people's applications and resumes are no longer buried due to things outside their control. DEI doesn't just support diversity in race, ethnicity, religion, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, or expression – but also veterans and people with disabilities. When all else is equal hiring agents naturally tend to hire people who look and think like them. It's human nature to be drawn to people we feel we relate to. Without DEI initiatives we are not encouraged to consider if this person is really the best fit for a job or scholarship, and the workforce is worse for it. I'll be the first to admit that DEI initiatives are not functioning as well as they are intended to, but removing them completely is not the solution.

As a former student and Ohio citizen, I implore you to vote no on this bill as it will hinder the ability for Ohioians to learn important things, drive prospective students towards other state's universities, and worsen the productivity of the workforce in Ohio. It was incredibly unpopular when introduced 2 years ago as SB 83 and it's no better now.

Thank you for your time,

Isabella Richardson