

February 10, 2025

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 Melissa Musgrove. I am a Social Worker and former Special Education Teacher. I proudly earned both degrees in Ohio at Case Western Reserve University and Kent State University respectively. I am strongly opposed to SB 1 and its companion bill HB 6.

In both degrees diversity and the study of marginalized communities were an integral part of my education and needed for my professions. The use of statement “controversial beliefs and policies” is vague and makes it too easy to pick and choose classes, organizations and degrees that don’t conform with this law. The fact that the general assembly could withhold money if these “terms” are violated puts non-educators in charge of areas they are not qualified to evaluate.

Diversity, equity and inclusion provides for special needs student to access public education with their peers. I worked with students that had emotional and behavioral deficits. One of my duties as a special educator was to make sure my students were included in as many typical classes and activities as possible. I had to push for these students to be included in field trips, clubs and sports. Without equity and inclusion these students would not have had these opportunities.

The classes I studied for my Social Work degree included many that focussed on marginalized and “intellectual diversity” that could easily fall under these policies. The National Association of Social Workers, Code of Ethics include “challenging social injustice” and “ethical responsibilities to the broader society”.

This includes the following

- Engaging in social and political actions that ensure that all people have equal access to resources to meet their needs.
- Expand opportunities for disadvantaged, oppressed and exploited groups.
- Promote conditions and policies that encourage respect for cultural and social diversity.
- Act to prevent exploitation and discrimination based on race, ethnicity, national origin, color, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, age, marital status, political beliefs, religion, immigration status or mental or physical ability.

These ethics seem in direct contrast to the items proposed in HB 1. Without these, social work education would be at best incomplete, at worst keep student from getting licensed. This will lead students to go to universities outside of our state. I know that keeping students in Ohio is of utmost importance to this body. My current work with older adults would be directly impacted if I was unable to study this population and the policies and discrimination that they face.

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

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify.

Melissa Musgrove MSSA, LSW; MEd