

Testimony of Sara Abou Rashed, MFA.
Before the Senate Higher Education Committee
Senator Kristina Roegner, Chair
February 10, 2025

Chair Roegner, Vice Chair Cirino, Ranking Member Ingram, and Members of the Higher Education Committee:

My name is Sara Abou Rashed and I am a graduate of Denison University and the University of Michigan. I am not speaking on behalf of the higher ed institutions where I studied or worked but rather as an appalled citizen opposed to Senate Bill 1.

Twelve years ago, I arrived to this country as a high school freshman not speaking any English. Word for word, I translated every textbook until I taught myself the language. Today, I stand before you as a proud graduate of Denison University and the University of Michigan, a two-time commencement speaker, a valedictorian, a TEDx Columbus speaker and a former lecturer at multiple higher ed institutions including CCAD and OSU.

Senate Bill 1 is a dangerous effort to erase all that's rich and beautiful on our university campuses: the diversity and differences that bring us together. More than that, it is erasing us— as people, our experiences, our journeys, our stories, our individual challenges, our perseverance, our accomplishments.

At Denison, I was the only student out of 2,000 wearing the hijab. I went on a full ride scholarship through I Know I Can which honored my story as a recent immigrant in the country. On campus, I stood out everywhere I went, and it became a permanent part of who I am. Instead of succumbing to feeling out of place, I became more involved in efforts to pave the way for other minority students. Without the support I received from faculty and staff who understood me and saw me for the identities and experiences I carried, I wouldn't have been the successful person I am today. I would not have been selected for Harvard' Public Policy Leadership conference or named a finalist for the Truman scholarship or awarded a Beinecke scholarship which funded my graduate studies at the University of Michigan. I went into campus not represented by a single person and left it as a presidential medalist and the student representative who spoke on behalf the entire student body on graduation day.

Who would I have been if SB 1 was in place? This bill is asking us to mute our voices, to erase every sign of difference, to lose the support and the funding that sustains minority students and ensures their equitable access to opportunities, this bill is asking us to become a monolith, to let go of our independent thinking, of the variety and difference that makes us who we are. Look around the room, we don't even look like each other, why should our universities?