

SB1 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 Claudia Wittich Jessee. I am special educator, behavioral therapist, and current doctoral student at University of Cincinnati. I am strongly opposed to SB 1 and its companion bill HB 6.

I have been in the field of education as a student and a teacher for the last 10 years. I am a child of a democrat and republican and understand the great importance of ensuring that students have the power to come to their own conclusions and have access to a wide range of information. That has been my educational experience at universities with strong Diversity, Equity and Inclusion programs. This bill describes not a protection for students, but a dangerous limitation of progress, access, and education. I am deeply concerned about the impact of SB 1 on my career, my education, my field, and on outcomes for all students. To limit higher education's ability to address "any belief or policy that is the subject of political controversy" creates a world in which true education is impossible. This legislature would limit the ability for programs like mine to address educational inequity and discuss how we, as educators, can create a world in which students from diverse backgrounds experience equity and inclusion. I have spent my career fighting for inclusion for students with disabilities and to hinder higher education's ability to discuss, train and fight for creating education for ALL students is a horrific limitation of progress for all Ohioans.

In public schools where I work, 60% of students do not look like their white teachers and school psychologists. In these schools, Hispanic, Black and Native American students are significantly more likely to be identified with a disability and less likely to receive a high school diploma. Students with disabilities do not consistently receive the education and support they deserve. We live in a world that is not equal and accessible for all children. To limit our ability to discuss this in higher education stops us from being able to promote change and progress in our failing education system. What you propose here would stop progress in its tracks and hinder the ability for educators to educate. As supposedly the party of small government, how can you justify this clear overstep into the autonomy of educators?

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

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify.

I will now take any questions you may have.