

Testimony of Sarah Richter
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 Sarah, and I received a B.S. in Psychology at the University of Cincinnati. I currently work with individuals with developmental and intellectual disabilities. I am submitting testimony as a private citizen in opposition to Senate Bill 1.

I oppose Senate Bill 1 due to the removal of DEI. Diversity, equity, and inclusion are the backbone of my education and current career. DEI is essential in both psychology and when working with individuals with disabilities. I learned American Sign Language from professors who were Deaf. I studied developmental disabilities from professors who had disabilities themselves. I would not be able to effectively work with my population if I did not learn from a person who had similar life experiences. Whether or not you remove DEI from universities, you cannot remove it from our lives. We live in a diverse world; one will encounter diversity in every occupation. The goal of higher education is to prepare us for our future careers. I would not be adequately prepared for my current career if DEI wasn't required.

I also oppose Senate Bill 1 for prohibiting the "endorsing or opposing [of] any controversial belief or policy." This bill states that universities must "allow students to reach their own conclusions about such topics and will not attempt to indoctrinate any social, political, or religious view." I feel this section is unnecessary. On many occasions I have observed students expressing an opinion that was contrary to social norms in an academic setting. Unless these statements were undeniably racist or insensitive they were never reprimanded for holding these beliefs. At the University of Cincinnati I took a Philosophy course where some relevant but controversial topics were discussed. In my opinion, the professor did an excellent job giving sources from both sides of the argument. I was unable to discern what the professor's true opinion of the topics were. He encouraged open discussion and was a neutral party, neither demeaning nor praising certain political viewpoints. One of the greatest benefits of college is exposure to different religions, worldviews, and opinions. If this bill passes, professors will be afraid to discuss controversial but essential topics, thus harming one of the most beneficial aspects of higher education.

I was born in Ohio and was proud to receive my undergraduate degree at a public institution. I plan on furthering my education, currently applying for masters' programs with the long-term intent of obtaining a PhD or Psy.D in clinical psychology. I am reconsidering my applications to public Ohio universities with this bill in committee. I fear if DEI is removed, and unscientific theories are taught, my program may lose its accreditation or reputation. Currently, I have only applied to programs in Ohio, as I had every intention of studying, working, and raising a family here. If this bill passes, I will be forced to leave Ohio to guarantee the quality of my education, and the education of my future children.