

Chairman Demetriou, Vice Chair Williams, and members of the House Higher Education Committee,

Thank you for allowing me to testify today. My name is Britta Bielak, and as a Professor at one of Ohio's public universities, I am one of Ohio's citizens whose livelihood would be most deeply and immediately impacted by the passage of HB 151. I urge you to deeply listen my testimony and those of other educators and students as you consider the impact this bill's passage would have on fellow families and citizens of Ohio who are currently serving your state or furthering their education in order to do so.

It seems that at the heart of this bill is a reasonable desire for more equitable representation of conservative perspectives in Ohio's higher education system. Regardless of which side of the political aisle you sit, does this resonate? Reflecting upon the DEI initiatives that have been growing in both the public and private sector, I'd ask if a similar approach of focused research and recruitment to increase "intellectual diversity" has been discussed? This sort of approach could begin by identifying any quantifiable under-representations in "intellectual diversity" that may exist in Ohio's public universities and colleges, then working collaboratively to understand *why* this may be the case, and finally developing equitable means of increasing representation that - just as DEI hires - are still based on merit, skill, etc.

What an approach like this could offer is a pathway to effective and sustainable inclusion that does not rely on suppressing and controlling Ohio's existing public servants, your fellow citizens, in order to increase representation of others. Instead of directly addressing this desire through a transparent and equitable process, the framework set out in HB 151 is structured to suppress and control existing employees and ideologies through increased state-run interventions, oversight and required adherence to certain beliefs even in exchange for funding. This will create a system of alarming and sweeping disempowerment of all faculty – regardless of ideology – through extensive removal of our collective bargaining rights.

As a Professor at one of Ohio's public universities, I welcome and encourage the presence of diverse perspectives, experiences, and values in the classroom. This bill, however, is clearly written to suppress this diversity in an attempt to lift a singular voice into the landscape. This is not an equitable, rational, or democratic approach to the inclusion desired and will reduce diversity and success of research, students, and faculty. As educators, many of us agree in the importance of a diversity of perspectives and intelligences, and we believe that the classroom must be a safe space where students are free to question, analyze, and discuss complex issues without fear of retribution or suppression. If this is genuinely the goal of this bill – to increase "intellectual diversity" in the classroom, please consider how challenging and delicate the creation of this space truly is. If through the passage of this bill, we as educators are losing our own safe space within the University by losing significant collective bargaining rights, losing our right to strike, and exposing our classroom content for surveillance and potential harassment, how could we possibly continue to create this critical and vulnerable space for our students?

The repercussions of passing HB 151 will have lasting negative effects on the quality of public higher education in Ohio. It is imperative that we do not let political agendas interfere with the fundamental principles of education that we hold so dearly. As representatives of the people of Ohio, I implore you to vote against this bill and begin the formation of a new, truly inclusive bill by first engaging in direct dialogue with the public servants you expect to carry out your political agendas. Consider how sitting down together and discussing concerns and needs of both educators and legislators *together* could lead to truly collaborative and inclusive outcomes that benefit Ohioans and the future of our state. Thank you for your continued attention to this critical matter and the opportunity to testify in opposition of HB 151.

Sincerely,

Britta Bielak