

BILL ANALYSIS

Senate Research Center

S.B. 1517
By: King
Subcommittee on Higher Education
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As Filed

AUTHOR'S / SPONSOR'S STATEMENT OF INTENT

The Texas Holocaust, Genocide, and Antisemitism Advisory Commission's 2022 "Study on Antisemitism in Texas" included a recommendation to consider prohibiting a state-funded college or university from implementing boycotts that would deprive students or faculty members of the ability to study or conduct research in or about a foreign country or to interact with its scholars or representatives.

This recommendation came from interviews and conversations with students and college faculty who saw the Boycott, Divestments, and Sanctions (BDS) movement gaining momentum among students, departments, and academic units. The campaigns have sometimes led to antisemitic acts against Jewish students.

The BDS campaign is a global movement that calls for economic, cultural, and academic sanctions against Israel—and only Israel. Since 2017 Texas has prohibited state agencies from contracting with companies that boycott Israel. The prohibition is one of the strongest anti-BDS laws in the nation—and this bill would extend that same concept to college campuses.

S.B. 1517 would require an institution of higher education to adopt rules to prohibit academic boycotts. The bill would, however, allow for academic boycotts if the target of the boycott is a state sponsor of terrorism, as defined by the United States Department of State.

Currently there are four countries designated under the U.S. Department of State list: Cuba, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (North Korea), Iran, and Syria.

As proposed, S.B. 1517 amends current law relating to academic boycotts at institutions of higher education.

RULEMAKING AUTHORITY

Rulemaking authority is expressly granted to the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board in SECTION 1 (Section 61.09093, Education Code) of this bill.

SECTION BY SECTION ANALYSIS

SECTION 1. Amends Subchapter C, Chapter 61, Education Code, by adding Section 61.09093, as follows:

Sec. 61.09093. ACADEMIC BOYCOTTS. (a) Requires the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board to adopt rules and policies to be followed by the governing boards of institutions of higher education prohibiting academic boycotts that would deprive students or faculty members of the ability to study or conduct research in or about a foreign country or to interact with its scholars or representatives.

(b) Requires that the rules allow the support of an academic boycott if the target is a foreign country that is a state sponsor of terrorism, as defined by the United States Department of State.

SECTION 2. Effective date: September 1, 2023.