

**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
COMPILATION OF PUBLIC COMMENTS**

Submitted to the Committee on Higher Education
For SB 17

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Hearing Date: May 8, 2023 8:00 AM

Maggie Stern, Program and Policy Manager, Youth Civic Engagement
Children's Defense Fund of Texas
Austin, TX

CDF-Texas opposes SB 17 in its entirety.

1) SB 17 threatens diversity and equity for students and educators.

Diversity, equity, and inclusion practices are rooted in the Civil Rights Movement and were created to bridge inequalities in our schools and workplaces – inequalities that have been ameliorated but still exist today. As a result of those efforts, Texas universities have become more accessible for all students.

But as of 2017, only 4% of UT System professors were Black, 11% Asian, and 16% Hispanic. Texas' diversity is not yet reflected by the faculty. SB 17 threatens to rollback efforts to hire talented faculty that represent the diversity of our state and students.

The impact of SB 17 is clear: universities fail to have faculty or programming that reflect the diversity of our students. Students rely on DEI offices to provide crucial resources and services that help students overcome the financial, cultural, and social barriers to receiving an education. Young Texans deserve to go to school at institutions where they can learn from and connect with faculty that reflect their experience.

2) SB 17 limits access to resources and programs that aid student success

SB 17 would harm students who rely on DEI services to aid in their academic and personal success. DEI offices are responsible for providing religious accommodations, translated documents, gender and sexuality resources, and much more for students. Some DEI offices provide mentorship programs to help students acclimatize to new school environments. Others, like the DEI office at UT Austin, are responsible for conducting school climate surveys and assessing the needs of the student body.

All of these services combine to enhance the educational experience of university students. Without institutional support, personnel, and necessary funds, these offices will no longer be able to provide these essential services. Students face plenty of obstacles to success without the removal of supports designed to help them.

3) SB 17 signals to students that their experience is not valued.

By prohibiting employees from discussing topics like race or gender, which span every subject, SB 17 would limit meaningful discourse. We've already seen the chilling effect of similar legislation, leaving K-12 educators less inclined to address complex topics like race, to the detriment of all students. Students are already struggling to have those necessary discussions earlier in education so it is even more crucial that universities not create new barriers.

DEI offices help to point students toward the places and people where community can be built. Whether this comes in the form of programs of study, multicultural engagement centers, or simply faculty who can be a familiar face, these have a tangible impact on people's sense of belonging. Students go to school to build personal and professional lives, supported by DEI, and we urge you to oppose this bill.

Jennifer Erickson
Self
Fort Worth, TX

I am appalled at this bill to ban diversity, equity and inclusion efforts. I am opposed to this. We should be working to be more inclusive not less.

William Davies

Breakthrough Central Texas

Austin, TX

I am the Associate Director of Policy and Data with Breakthrough Central Texas. S.B. 17 would compromise students' academic and social experiences on college campuses and make college faculty less diverse and inclusive of different backgrounds and ideas. Breakthrough Central Texas is a college access and success program that helps create a path to and through college for students who will become the first in their families to earn a college degree. We serve more than 2,600 first-generation college aspirants and their families in the region with learning and leadership opportunities and comprehensive advising, middle school through postsecondary completion. While the Austin metro is one of the most highly educated in Texas, only 1 in 10 Central Texas 8th graders from low-income communities is completing a postsecondary degree within 10 years. This gap persists at a time when 62% of Texas jobs will require a postsecondary credential by 2030. In over two decades of organizational experience, we know that no matter how much determination our students display and how much support they receive from their families, schools, and community, first-generation students' educational pathways are full of barriers and challenges they must navigate and overcome. S.B. 17 moves us in the wrong direction by creating or worsening these barriers. Prohibiting DEI offices and policies in Texas public colleges and universities will signal to students from underrepresented backgrounds that the state and higher education institutions are not invested in their educational success and put into jeopardy a large variety of programs and services that are key to their academic and social success on campus. DEI efforts ensure that students are supported in every aspect of their lives: assistance with food, housing, and emergency financial aid; textbooks and other resources for student success; opportunities and application guidance for internal and external student scholarships; culturally-relevant programming and community building; offices that address the unique needs of veterans, first-generation students, and rural students; mental and physical health clinics; and offices that assist students in addressing harms such as harassment or violence. DEI efforts also ensure that faculty are adequately prepared to teach a diverse student body and help prevent actions and behavior that could inadvertently disadvantage students from historically marginalized backgrounds. In a recent survey of college-enrolled Breakthrough students, nearly 3/4 reported that when they face academic, financial, or social challenges at school, they turn to DEI-associated offices, initiatives, and staff to obtain assistance or support. S.B 17 threatens our students' access to these critical supports that play an outsized role in keeping them on track to degree completion. I urge you NOT to enact legislation that moves our state backwards in our shared effort to improve postsecondary access and success.

Shanda Bass

Self

Fairview, TX

Stop the insanity. It's bad enough you want to control what is taught in high schools, but colleges, too? What happened to critical thinking, the presentation of various points of view and LEARNING? You are making the Republican Party look like sheep, scared sheep, who are afraid that if people are educated, they won't vote for you. If you care about education, then fund it fully and give it a measure of autonomy.

L Quentin Dixon

Self/concerned citizen

Spring, TX

Please vote NO on SB 17 because inclusive and welcoming institutions of higher education benefits everyone. DEI office and initiatives are meant to ensure an inclusive and equitable environment for all, and these offices and programs are often critical to helping first-generation college students find the support they need to succeed.

Kat Alexander

Self - teacher

Round Rock, TX

I am highly opposed to SB 17. In a global society in which all people should be treated equally, this bill is the antithesis of what Texas needs. Our communities are full of people from all walks of life and our higher education institutions should be reflective of our communities. All schools should be. Education is for all of us. Why are we going backwards? Why are we making it easier to exclude people we don't understand or are different from ourselves? We should be working towards making Texas a safe and inclusive place for all people. In Texas, y'all means ALL. Please protect the offices and policies working towards that goal on our campuses and work instead towards making Texas a friendly place for all people.

Sheila Bean
self
Lampasas, TX

I have earned both a Bachelor of Arts Degree and a Masters of Arts Degree in Education. I have taught in Texas and California Public Schools. There is no reason to promote DEI in our colleges and then spread it into our Public Schools. I ask you as a concerned Texas Voter to pass out of committee and support on the House floor SB17. DEI is a political agenda that awards people who are not qualified or have the drive and innovative desire to do their best effort. You have heard all the arguments. This bill needs to pass and be signed by the Governor this Session.

Holly Levin-Aspenson, Dr.
self / Assistant Professor of Psychology
Denton, TX

Although I am submitting this comment as a private citizen, this bill has direct implications for my work as a faculty member at the University of North Texas. We are one of very few universities to be designated as a minority- and Hispanic-serving institution as well as a research-intensive R1 institution. The DEI work at UNT is foundational to our success in serving not only our students, but the Texas communities they go on to serve themselves. To receive federal funding as an HSI, we must show that the institution has implemented an appropriate strategy for “servingness” in relation to Hispanic students. Under SB 17, programming that is specifically targeted toward Hispanic students would be illegal, and so Texas institutions would lose this designation and access to millions of dollars in federal grants. We faculty are already working hard to secure funding for research and educational efforts and cannot afford additional administrative burden. The carve outs in this version for federal research grants will create an unnecessary burden and bureaucracy at each institution, and if DEI is otherwise illegal at an institution, there is a high likelihood that grants will not be awarded to researchers at institutions wherein the long-term commitment to the DEI component cannot be implemented. The continued growth of the university and further development of our national reputation depends on our ability to recruit and retain talented faculty and students. “Diversity statements” are not loyalty oaths or political litmus tests. They are documents that allow a job candidate to discuss the ways that they create inclusive labs, classrooms, research teams, and learning spaces for diverse students and colleagues. The new version of this bill repeatedly uses the language of “preferential treatment.” Without DEI, preferential treatment will be given to those from majority backgrounds because efforts to recruit a diverse pool of job applicants will likely not be allowed under SB 17. Finding a diverse pool of job applicants is already a challenge given Texas politics, and we’ve already seen recruitment and retention issues this academic year due to the chilling effect proposed laws have had on recruiting prospective candidates.

Cilicia Landers
Self/SAHM
Austin, TX

The government and universities need to let LGBTQIA+ people be. They should be able to assemble and express themselves just like every other student. Stop policing gender and sexuality; it’s not needed.

Deana Johnston
self
Dallas, TX

Political activism has no place in higher education.

Brittany Martuscello

Self

Frisco, TX

This is ridiculous. It's bad enough you want to control what's taught in schools. What happened to critical thinking, the presentation of other various points of view and learning about others? Why diminish someone who is probably already going through turmoil? There is no empathy in this bill. There is no freedom of thought in this bill. Isn't that what everyone wants, freedom for themselves, to be who they are? It makes you look scared of someone who is different. Are you that sad and insecure that you can't even allow diversity on a college campus? This is a lower form of thinking, not a higher form, which is what college is for. I hope that one day this bill affects you, or someone you love, and you can see how much diversity and inclusion betters everyone everywhere. Prove these programs are ineffective. Change my mind. I'm waiting...

Brittany Trinite

self - music therapist

Round Rock, TX

I oppose this bill. It is critical to acknowledge disparities between race, gender, and identity in this country or we cannot have a government that is actually FOR the people.

Briana Owirodu

Self

Celina, TX

Do not take it away

Lauren Cheek

Self/Student

Austin, TX

As a student at the University of Texas, the implementation of DEI is greatly important for my future success. I am on the path to go into the medical field. The opportunity to grow and learn more about the wide variety of cultures in Texas is imperative for my education. Additionally, many first-generational students come from minority backgrounds. DEI programs allow for the creation of safe spaces for these minorities and encourages higher education among all Texans. The removal of DEI programs from higher education would lead to a Texas with a less educated population.

Gabriella Sugerman

Self, Student

Austin, TX

SB 17 would be profoundly harmful to current and future students and academics and would have ripple effects into all of society. Efforts to increase equity and diversity at higher education institutions are meant to counteract decades of systemic injustice that have marginalized people with nondominant identities. Passing this bill makes it very clear that our legislators approve of these systemic injustices and actively want them to persist. Recruitment and retention of talented scholars will plummet and this legislation will make a mockery of the University of Texas system and all public universities in the state.

Kathryn Kizer

Access Education RRISD

Austin, TX

I oppose SB 17. DEI helps Universities and employers to not discriminate. DEI policies are backed by federal law.

Tracie Matysik
Independent citizen, educator
Austin, TX

I write in favor of supporting programs to further diversity, equity, and inclusion at Texas universities. I was honored to receive a prize from my university for "equity and inclusiveness in the classroom," and I want to speak to what those categories mean in the classroom. They mean creating a space in which students of all backgrounds can discuss difficult topics together. They mean creating a space where students can really hear one another and learn about different perspectives. My students have consistently thanked me for creating a rigorous academic setting in which they nonetheless feel comfortable. They comment regularly on evaluations that it is my openness to diverse backgrounds and perspectives that lets them feel comfortable enough to really learn and expand their own perspectives on the world. We live in a tremendously divided world right now, and shutting down DEI programs will shut down precisely this kind of setting for informed, empathetic learning and understanding. It will set us back decades.

Equity does NOT mean equal outcomes. It means making sure the infrastructure is in place for people of diverse backgrounds to have a variety of ways to participate in, shape, contribute to our institutions.

Thank you for your time.

Andrea Wallace
Self / Marketing
Frisco, TX

Keep DEI programs protected

Nia Franzua
Texas BSA of The University of Texas at Austin
Desoto, TX

Good morning, My name is Nia Franzua and I'm a student at the University of Texas at Austin. I am Afro-Latina, meaning my mother is African American and my father is Latino. I'm from Desoto, Texas, a town in South Dallas that's predominantly Black and Hispanic, as well as the surrounding cities like Lancaster, Oak Cliff, duncanville, and cedar hill. Because of this, I went to school around mostly black and brown folks. So, when I decided to pursue higher education at UT Austin, a PWI, I had a very big culture shock. I had never been around the amount of white people i have when I got to UT. This was a huge adjustment, but I was able to find my community of Black and Brown people when I got there. Now that I've completed my first year of college, I can say that DEI practices were a key component to my impeccable first year experience. Opportunities like Texas BSA, Study abroad by DDCE Global, Black homecoming, MLK march, New Black Student Weekend, Central American Student Association, Longhorn Fiesta, and many more events that express Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion were able to happen and make my friends, peers, and staff members at my school feel welcomed and like we belong here. It also helped many students and staff make an impact and blaze trails. It also allowed my white counterparts to experience other cultures and learn about other cultures in an accredited space. If we lose DEI practices, we aren't just failing those who fall under the DEI umbrella, we're also failing those who don't, because they won't be able to experience and learn more about those who do. DEI is vital and will be the reason some people get to get degrees they'd never thought they receive, raises and bonuses they never thought they were worthy of, and many more things that we may or may not be able to see. Please keep DEI in place, thank you!

Sabrina Ball
self, homemaker
Fort Worth, TX

I oppose this bill. This is the silencing of free speech and is inherently racist/anti-lgbtq. We must learn from our past in order to progress as a country and we must be inclusive of all citizens.

Larissa Davila

self

Austin, TX

I would urge the committee to vote AGAINST SB 17, I am a Latina woman and I believe that it is difficult as it is to navigate in a world that doesn't understand my culture and my background, and having DEI removed from higher education institutions would just make it harder for women like me to access education. If for whatever reason, we got a fighting chance without it, then it would be tremendously hard to communicate with other people that don't understand where people like me come from, our obstacles and barriers. Please keep DEI in higher education.

Janet Liu

Self

Dallas, TX

I strongly oppose the bill.

Reed Bilz, Ms

Self

Fort Worth, TX

I am writing to urge you to OPPOSE SB 17 that would do away with DEI at public colleges and universities. DEI does not divide campus communities; it helps to facilitate inclusive and supportive learning environments for all.

Please vote NO on this divisive bill.

Jordan Cheek

Self, student

Austin, TX

DEI training is important in every field as it helps everyone become aware and accepting of the variety of cultures that exist in the United States. Recognizing diversity and having training required in it can only help people become more open to others and be a more understanding individual. In universities, this is especially important as students can come from all over the world and from each and every walk of life, so it is important that DEI be incorporated into the learnings students are involved in, so we can be a better support for our peers and learn from them. Universities should not be punished for providing this education to students as many students are interested in learning how they can be a inclusive student and bring this knowledge with them to their careers.

Shalene Jha

self

Austin, TX

I am commenting as a private citizen on SB 17 - there is tremendous need for higher education programs to support students from underrepresented backgrounds, such as those facing critical socioeconomic, racial, and gender-based barriers. The banning of DEI offices and programming will stifle the critical mentoring support that these students need and deserve.

Caroline Crocker

Self - student

Spring, TX

I strongly urge you to vote no to SB17. Offices of diversity, equity, and inclusion have been crucial to my experiences in college outside of the classroom. When I had questions or needed information or resources, offices like the gender center at UT Dallas were always there for me. I think a thorough knowledge of DEI is very important for me heading into my career once I graduate next week, and if this bill is passed you will be creating college graduates that are woefully underprepared for working in the 21st century. Not to mention, the gender center on our campus provides resources to student parents and menstrual products to students who cannot afford them, and if centers like this are defunded, many women will not be able to continue their college education. Please vote no for this bill in order to protect the futures of college graduates in Texas.

Jannah Collins
Self and student
Austin, TX

This is unfair and outrageous! Higher education is where I was able to mature and really see the importance of DEI. As a black student the efforts and organizations that have been created for us have made my experience so impactful. Why are you trying to get rid of something when at the end of the day the white is still the majority they still have the most privilege and have advantages over everyone else. This isn't right!

Tania Tasneem
Self
Austin, TX

I am Tania Tasneem. Texan born, Pakistani raised, with a little twist of El Paso. I am a proud product of EPISD, UTeach alumna, 8th grade science teacher, and volleyball & track coach at Kealing Middle School in AISD (Go Hornets)! This is my 16th year serving as a classroom teacher and mentor for pre-service and novice teachers. As you know, many teachers including myself rely on summer work to make ends meet throughout the year. Last year, I had the privilege of working with several STEM programs that fall under the umbrella of DEI at The University of Texas at Austin. I was blown away at the resources and support that I wished existed when I was in school 20 years ago. I was relying on working in this program again this summer for an extended period so that my husband and I would have enough money to pay our property taxes and possibly a little extra to go on vacation. Instead, I received an email from a former colleague who left the classroom to work with this program that due to the nature of conversations in session and lack of grant funding, that she would need to cut my position along with several other camp counselors.

I am opposed to this bill. Why prohibit offices of diversity, equity, and inclusion. Doing so sends a clear message to people in these underrepresented groups. We are not wanted here. Passing this bill would make people from underrepresented groups feel less welcome, turn back efforts to correct past discrimination and halt progress toward making campuses more representative of the state's population. It would also make it harder for universities to receive research funding from federal agencies or private organizations that consider commitments to diversity when awarding grants. Many of which I have been a recipient of.

Ling Ge
Self
Plano, TX

I am against the bill.

veronica comstock, dr.

self retired

Austin, TX

Our educational institutions must prepare our diverse populations with skills these employers need to compete in the marketplace of today and the future. We must recruit and retain these students.

Quotes from McKinsey research reports 2018-2023.

COVID-19 is confronting companies around the world with a daunting degree of disruption. In the immediate term, some face devastating losses of revenue, dislocations to operations and supply chains, and challenges to liquidity and solvency. Others are coping with enormous unexpected spikes in demand. In the medium term, we can expect material and lasting shifts in customer markets, regulatory environments, and workforce deployments. Leaders and managers will need a great deal of resolve and resilience as they seek to navigate an economically and socially viable path toward a 'next normal.' Inclusion and diversity are at risk in the crisis—but are critical for business recovery, resilience, and reimagination.

Research has repeatedly shown that gender and ethnic diversity, inclusion, and performance go hand in hand. For example, over the past five years, the likelihood that diverse companies will out-earn their industry peers has grown. So have the penalties for companies lacking diversity.

The lessons from previous crises tell us there is a very real risk that inclusion and diversity (I&D) may now recede as a strategic priority for organizations. This may be quite unintentional: companies will focus on their most pressing basic needs—such as urgent measures to adapt to new ways of working; consolidate workforce capacity; and maintain productivity, a sense of connection, and the physical and mental health of their employees.

Yet we would argue that companies pulling back on I&D now may be placing themselves at a disadvantage: they could not only face a backlash from customers and talent now but also, down the line, fail to better position themselves for growth and renewal. Some of the qualities that characterize diverse and inclusive companies—notably innovation and resilience—will be much in need as companies recover from the crisis. It could help companies to unlock the power of I&D as an enabler of business performance and organizational health and contribute to the wider effort to revive economies and safeguard social cohesion.

Our research has repeatedly shown that gender and ethnic diversity, inclusion, and performance go hand in hand. Our latest report reinforces the business case. Over the past five years, the likelihood that diverse companies will out-earn their industry peers has grown. So have the penalties for companies lacking diversity.

Diversity winners that deploy a systematic approach to inclusion and diversity and don't fear bold action to foster inclusion and belonging are most likely to reap the rewards. Now is the time to be even bolder.

Alyson Freeman

Self, engineer

Round Rock, TX

I am strongly in opposition to this bill. In my career as an engineering manager, I see very day how essential DEI programs are to having the technical workforce that we need in Texas. I am deeply concerned that without these programs, we will not have the pipeline of students needed to fill the open jobs we have, and will instead need to bring them from out of the state or country.

J Roberts

Self

Austin, TX

My name is John Roberts. I am writing as a private citizen of TX. I write to oppose SB 17. Abolishing DEI programs will damage the quality of the education that students at institutions like UT Austin receive.

As a white man, I have benefited from those diversity and inclusion programs in numerous ways, particularly from the various perspectives a diverse student body brought to my own education and experiences at a public university. I fear SB 17 will damage the reputation of the University of Texas and harm all students who attend there - past, present, and future.

Debbie Brand, Ms.

Self

Granbury, TX

Keep things as they are currently . Vote against this bill.

Emlyn Lee

Self

Austin, TX

I am writing to express my strong support for Senate Bill 17 (SB 17) which address critical issues in higher education. As a concerned citizen and advocate for academic freedom and educational equity, I believe these bills are essential for safeguarding the principles that underpin our educational system.

SB 17 provides necessary safeguards to protect the rights of individuals to express differing viewpoints without fear of retribution or censorship. By promoting open dialogue and intellectual discourse, this bill encourages a healthy exchange of ideas and the pursuit of truth. It is vital that our higher education institutions remain spaces where diverse perspectives can be shared, debated, and respected, contributing to the robust development of critical thinking skills and a well-rounded education.

This bill will ensure that our universities and colleges remain centers of intellectual rigor, free thought, and open dialogue, which are essential for cultivating informed and engaged citizens.

Thank you for your attention to this matter. I strongly urge you to consider the long-term benefits these bills will bring to our educational system and support their passage.

Linda Hanratty

self

Fort Worth, TX

SB 17 even as substituted is a terrible bill. Diversity, equity, and inclusion should be celebrated, not made illegal. This law would jeopardize the awarding of Federal Education grants and by extension hurt our wonderful public universities. Top students and professors will choose to attend out-of-state universities where DEI is celebrated. Mean-spirited bills like this must not pass unless Legislators really want Texas to be backward and mean spirited.

James Sidbury

Self: Professor of History at Rice University

Houston, TX

Having taught in Texas universities for more than thirty years (twenty years at the University of Texas at Austin and eleven at Rice University), I have witnessed the ways that the halting progress that has been made in diversity and inclusion among both students and faculty have deepened and enriched classroom discussions, faculty deliberation, and the broad range of informal interactions that are central to the creation and transmission of knowledge in our universities. Halting efforts to make the faculty and student bodies of our universities reflect the populations that we are supposed to serve will hurt the students of Texas by weakening their educations and by damaging the reputation of the state's public universities and thus the competitiveness of graduates on the job market. This bill should be rejected, both because it offers a solution for a problem that doesn't exist and because it will damage the students and institutions it presumably intends to help.

Susan Burek
Member of Texas State Employees Union
Austin, TX

PLEASE VOTE NO ON SB 17.

SB 17 would ban DEI policies at state universities. This bill is an effort to silence the voices of people from marginalized communities and a direct attack on academic freedom.

Thank you very much.

Shoshana Ellis, Mrs
Self
Richardson, TX

Passing this bill will significantly weaken the Texas public university system. We will lose out on the best students and professors.

Juan Preciado, Mr.
Self
Austin, TX

I strongly disagree with SB 17 that seeks to limit or eliminate diversity, equity, and inclusion programs in public universities. Such programs play a crucial role in fostering a welcoming and inclusive environment for all students, regardless of their race, ethnicity, gender, or background.

Removing these programs would be a significant setback for the progress we have made towards building a more just and equitable society. It would send a message that discrimination and prejudice are acceptable, which is unacceptable in any modern and democratic society.

Instead of limiting these programs, we should be expanding them to ensure that everyone has equal access to opportunities and resources. We should be encouraging diversity and inclusion in all aspects of our society, including our educational institutions. By doing so, we can create a better future for all, where everyone has a chance to succeed and thrive.

Zachary Kolodny
Self (recent law school graduate)
Austin, TX

DEI is an important part of making higher education inclusive and enabling people to have the tools to be successful. I oppose this legislation which bans DEI. I find that the opponents of DEI don't propose other remedies to resolve racism such as investing in communities. We need to be remedying racism and not making it worse.

Lora Wildenthal, Prof.
self, occupation professor
Houston, TX

DEI statements simply state what is already the law. We must be treated equally. The problem is that creating equal competitive situations is just a lot harder than many people assume, so their patience is limited and their selfishness is great.

Most people like to game the competition in ways that suit them, but there is nothing objective about that. There are lots and lots of ways of setting up competitions to achieve desired results, without being unfair. The sheer variety of people always goes beyond the simple categories that most people think in, and that comes out where DEI is emphasized.

Yes, there will be stories of stupid people stating, for example, that they will only hire a person of a certain race, gender, etc. Unfortunately stupidity is not against the law. Where I have encountered such ignorance and essentialism, I have confronted the person and explained my institution's legal responsibilities regarding fair hiring, as well as the awfulness and illogic of hiring someone based on who they are, rather than what they can do.

Outlawing DEI is merely an effort to pretend everything is fair as it is. That has never been true in American history and it is not true today. We are on the cusp of fairness, but we are not there. Let us dare to talk about actual equality, the radical promise of our country since its founding.

Bonnie Seelig
Self Retired
Spicewood, TX

Support SB 17

Since when do we promote differential treatment or special benefits to individuals on the basis of race, color or ethnicity? Who would have thought that the "woke" means returning to the past and starting over?

Are you telling me that the "woke" have no policies to support that make our country better? They are looking to start over with the issues of the mid 20th century.

Have we come to the point that we have to have a law that tells universities that they cannot discriminate?

Do we have to have a law stating that public universities cannot maintain an office of discrimination supported by tax payer money?

Our country is suffering from such misguided view of reality. I guess that is the result of too much drug use.

Hailey Ross
The university of Texas at austin- D9 sorority and fraternity
Houston, TX

Diversity and Inclusion programs are necessary for everyone's education, period.

Selah Tacconi
Self/Director of Grants Management
Galveston, TX

Hello,

My name is Selah Tacconi, and I am speaking for myself as a private individual and would like to go on record opposing SB 17. I am also the Director of Grants Management at Lee College, a community college in Baytown. Additionally, I am a proud graduate of the University of Houston- Clear Lake, Lamar University, and I am currently working toward my doctorate in Education from Baylor University. I have experienced firsthand how access to education changes families, lifting them from generational poverty and maximizing their potential in the workforce. I want to thank the committee members for your time and dedication to all the bills that come before you.

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) initiatives at Texas higher education institutions do not create division. Instead, DEI initiatives ensure intentional efforts are made to include all students, focusing on how diversity strengthens our communities and workforce. In the same vein, DEI statements developed by job applicants are not indoctrination, but rather these statements are evidence that the candidate understands their students and how to leverage their experiences in the classroom to promote success and ensure completion.

I urge the committee members to think about the implications of this bill carefully. Based on the language, there are potential unintentional consequences that can drastically reduce the capacity of Texas higher education institutions to access millions of dollars in federal and private grant funds. Many of the grant initiatives from the Department of Education and the Department of Labor are focused on workforce development, infrastructure capacity, and high-demand hard to fill areas such as medical and logistics.

Without these grant funds, Texas higher education institutions are less equipped to meet the goals of the Governor's Building a Talent Strong Texas initiative. All colleges and universities in Texas leverage federal grant funds with state funding to maximize the impact of these programs on student success. The potential fiscal effect of losing federal grant funding at Lee College for one year is \$20- 25 million.

I am deeply concerned that in attempting to solve one perceived problem, SB 17 will create many additional issues that will ultimately return full circle to this committee to address in the future. Thank you for the revisions for SB 17 that have recently been shared with the public. We should continue to have a productive dialogue about how this bill will affect all areas of universities and community colleges in Texas. We can all agree that we want the quality, prestige, and ranking of our public colleges and universities to be maintained by the consequences of the language used in SB 17. We would want to avoid direct conflict with federal grant compliance guidelines that would cause additional bureaucracy and undue burden on our higher education institutions in Texas.

Sincerely,
Selah Tacconi
Galveston County

Anat Belasen
UT Austin
Austin, TX

This bill is inherently at odds with the institution of higher education, the principles of academic freedom and more broadly freedom of speech, and directly works against the best interests of Texans and Texas institutions of higher education. As an academic scientist with 3 years of undergraduate training, 9 years of graduate-level training and 4 years of postgraduate experience in academic institutions, I have relied on the support of DEI offices at all four institutions at which I have studied or been employed. These offices have resources that are directly used by members of historically excluded and under-represented groups of people including myself. To remove them would undo decades of progress in ensuring education and equity for all people, particularly those people for whom social and economic barriers have existed since the inception of higher education in the US. As a private citizen, I fervently oppose this bill. If this bill passes, I and my contemporaries who are looking for permanent jobs in higher education will move to other states where such regulations do not exist. This would represent a critical loss of economic gain, innovation, and relevancy for Texas.

Cory Wimberly

Self

Austin, TX

As an educator myself, I know how important it is to have a diversity of voices and experiences in the classroom. In everything from math to literature, it is an incredible aid to have students offer different thoughts on solutions and different paths to arrive at those solutions. While not all the ideas are correct or efficient, it is invaluable for students to learn to look at things in different ways and figure out what makes a better or a worse approach and solution. Critical thinking comes from practice and without diversity, we lack the chance for critical thinking.

We should be encouraging--for the good of all of our students--a diverse a classroom as we can manage. The evidence is there. Just as one small illustration--the best way to achieve higher learning outcomes for students in groups is either to A) group them randomly to try to attain diversity or B) place students in groups that are as heterogeneous as possible. If the classroom lacks heterogeneity, then we are already starting off behind students who do have the advantage of diversity.

Eric Metraux

self

Austin, TX

I am against this bill. Not having a diversity, equity, and inclusion office will make learning institutions worse. When I went to school at UNT, our DEI office provided a safe space for people who were not white to come together and form community, and to learn about important things.

Amy Haley
Self
, Pflugerville, TX

Good Morning Committee Members,

My name is Amy and I am testifying against SB17. I am representing myself, and do so with the best interest of this community, its residents, and the integrity of higher education at heart.

Colleges and universities are beacons for diversity. It's part of what makes cities like Austin, with more than a dozen higher education campuses, such rich cultural hubs.

As an undergrad, I experienced first-hand how DEI programs helped our Texas schools stay competitive nationally and globally. Simply supporting these programs is also a tangible show of support that can help begin rectifying the racial history of our institution and state, and ensuring that students of all backgrounds are able to succeed.

The numbers don't lie.

1. Improved academic outcomes:

More diverse student bodies are associated with better academic outcomes. A study in the Journal of Higher Education found that increasing diversity on college campuses led to higher levels of academic achievement, such as graduation rates and GPAs. Students who interacted with peers from diverse backgrounds were also found to develop critical thinking skills, cross-cultural competence, and empathy.

2. Increased retention rates:

DEI programs can improve retention rates for underrepresented students. For example, the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) saw a 10% increase in graduation rates for Black students after implementing a program to provide academic and social support. This is important because Black and Hispanic students are less likely to complete their degrees than their white counterparts.

3. Financial benefits:

Institutions with diverse student bodies also have higher alumni giving rates, as reported by the American Council on Education.

I'd like to thank you again for your time and restate how dangerous SB 17 is to the wellbeing and future success of our Texas schools. I wholeheartedly oppose SB 17, and any other measures that would restrict the natural flourishing of diversity and inclusion in our schools. Texas is better than this. Prove it.

Best,
Amy

Gladys Morris
Self
League City, TX

As a Texas resident I am opposed to the passage of SB 17 and SB 18. Passage of these bills would be detrimental to the citizens of Texas.

Nancy Woods
home/ I represent myself
Houston, TX

Members,

Please vote for SB 17 and SB 18. We don't want or need EDI in education or anywhere else and we don't want radical professors hiding behind their tenure.

Thank you.

Rebecca Clemons

Self Student

Austin, TX

I am extremely opposed to this bill. DEI initiatives work to support the engagement and inclusion of underrepresented communities. By removing the offices and programs in place that support these initiatives, underrepresented communities will suffer. Though these initiatives are in place to specifically target underrepresented minorities, they end up also benefiting everyone and are a net positive to public institutions. DEI should be a priority for these public institutions, especially in hiring. The population of Texas is diverse, and higher education should be committed to uplifting and supporting those diverse communities as we move toward the future. An bill like this against DEI programs will set the state back and actively harm marginalized communities. Again, I am strongly opposed to this bill being passed.

Monica Newton

Self

Austin, TX

The Lege should not decide what courses can be offered or how tenure works in higher education. Students should have the freedom to decide which courses they want to pay for. Schools should have the free-market opportunity to offer the classes that students want.

Amanda Erickson

Self

Austin, TX

Pease vote no on this bill. This actively harms our children.

Ashley Jackson

self, realtor, Texas mother

AUSTIN, TX

As a REALTOR I am called by my code of ethics to uphold fair housing laws. This is enshrined in our code because, throughout American history, the privilege of homeownership was DENIED to a large segment of Americans based on the color of their skin. The loss of homeownership and the opportunity to build generational wealth continues to harm minority Americans today. Studies show that rates of homeownership are significantly lower among black, latino, and other minority groups. DEI programs invite all (including white people) to participate and to have their voices safely heard which is a form of inclusion. My REALTOR code of ethics does not allow for exclusion. America has not achieved equality and rates of homeownership show this. We must work to expand efforts of inclusion and DEI programs are effective at doing this. As a Texas mother with a junior in high school, I am horrified that any Texas university that my son may consider may not include DEI efforts. I question if such a narrow view, as offered by SB 17, of the world has a place for my child in it. We have been considering sending him to a University in another state because of the efforts at the state level to enshrine discrimination. Eliminating DEI programs will narrow the full breadth of the educational experience which invites us to consider other viewpoints. Furthermore, as a taxpayer I do not support my tax dollars being used to exclude the experiences and histories of my fellow Americans.

Stacey Irish-Keffer

Self

Denton, TX

As a librarian and parent of a Texas public school graduate, I am firmly opposed to this bill. It is ridiculous that our legislature would want to stop diversity and inclusion training in the places of government and education, where we need it. Historically marginalized groups have suffered because of a lack of understanding and ongoing prejudices and biases on the part of the majority. Banning students, employees, employers from participating in DEI, bias, oppression, gender identity training will only lead to continuing problems for vulnerable people. We are a state that embraces our backgrounds, our history, our identities, and we should support the learning of other points of view to strengthen our state, not weaken it. Members of the Texas legislature would certainly benefit from anti-bias, diversity training based on many of their comments and interactions with people who are different from them.

After the tragedy of George Floyd's death, there was such a strong response and crying out for change, for embracing diversity, and for accepting the stories and views of people from all backgrounds. This bill is taking us backwards. We do not want to return to the 1950s.

Do not advance this bill.

Kelly Zamudio

self

Austin, TX

This bill will be highly prejudicial to the state because it will gut the University system. Much of our mission at public universities is to educate, mentor all our students who come to our institutions of higher organization and this means paying attention to diversity and equity. If equity can no longer be considered a core mission and value of universities you will have a ghost university that does not attract new faculty. This will gut the research and development power of the UT system, with profound economic consequences for the state economy. This bill is a disservice to higher education.

Paula Wagner

Self

Houston, TX

I am 100% opposed to SB 17. DEI programs are absolutely crucial to the success of Texas and creating an inclusive and fair future for our children. The lack of equity in this state is absolutely disturbing and these programs are absolutely necessary. Programs like the University of Texas DEI programs have strongly influenced my growth as a female leader in the energy industry and I humbly give back by mentoring and participating in supporting our future generation.

Liana Lopez

Nuestra Palabra

Humble, TX

DEI programs are that programs promote diversity, equity, and inclusion in our schools and communities, and they are essential for creating a more just and equal society, on the one hand, a global competitiveness, on the other. Agreement to pass this bill is putting much of our civil rights progress at risk.

Tatem Oldham

self, counselor

Austin, TX

SB 17 I've worked as a counselor for a Texas public university for almost 20 years. Many of our first generation college students don't feel like they belong in college. We work hard to know they are supported and welcome here. DEI programs increase the number of students who graduate from college. They also help poor students afford to go to college. I know there are many ways to be successful and that college isn't right for anyone. However, we don't want students dropping out of college or not applying to college because they are low income or because their parents couldn't afford college. Someone in your family was the first to attend college, and it made all the difference for future generations of Texans.

Jennifer Boldenow

Self

Fort Worth, TX

To whom it may concern,

My name is Jennifer Boldenow; I grew up in small-town Granbury, Texas, and now am a chemical engineer employed by the largest chemical company in the world. I am a hispanic woman with parents who immigrated to America for a better life, and have capitalized on their sacrifices by carving my own career path in STEM. My success would not have been possible without the implementation of DEI groups from kindergarten to college level institutions.

I owe my career to the DEI outreach programs that capitalized on my interest in engineering at a young age, and I will be forever grateful for these opportunities. The fact that this bill will cut funding to programs that have had such a profound impact on my life is a slap in the face, especially in 2023. We have moved so far forward, and this bill would take us 20 steps backwards.

Additionally, limitation of these programs will DIRECTLY impact the success of all engineering fields in the state of Texas. I am incredibly ashamed that the state I call home actively fights against who I am as a human, and all descendants of immigrants who actively pursue the "American Dream." I urge all members of Texas congress to vote "no" on this bill.

John Mckiernan

self - teacher

Austin, TX

I write to encourage the committee to slow the movement to overreach and micromanage staff and administration committed to equality and student success at our universities.

It is my experience at Texas State that staff connected to DEI initiatives are amongst the hardest-working, creative, and committed employees. They are committed to the university mission and they are among the most popular with students, especially first-gen and low income students. This staff and administration spend arduous amounts of time finding ways to financially and institutionally level the college playing field for students who experience our university as a place where their families' experience tells them they do not belong.

DEI staff work endless hours with cranky faculty and students to help the university demonstrate that these first-gen working class students, be they men or women, do belong and can succeed.

Help keep our public universities connecting with the majorities of people graduating from our high schools. DEI initiatives are key to keeping students, staff and faculty connected to the public mission and public responsibility of our universities.

Micromanaging these initiatives seems a waste of public tax money that could be invested in programs that do help students make universities a place for them to engage the world in all its complexity, and get an education for the future at the same time.

In addition, many public universities, from TX A&M to Texas Tech are also Hispanic Serving Institutions that get a second chance at federal support for all kinds of research and teaching because of federal HSI initiatives, much of which is not always directly HSI related. Why is the legislature in Texas so willing to risk federal funding and federal programs made available through a program titled "Hispanic Serving," ? Are you beholden to the anti-DEI thought police running rampant through the internet? No, you are responsible to all the residents and taxpayers of this state, not some think-tank flunkie in Florida.

I encourage this committee to do the right and easy thing and stop coddling this moral panic over "diversity" and "equity" in universities.

Our public universities have a mission is to create institutions and graduate students who can understand the complexities of the ethnically diverse, changing and globalising world we live in. Why make it harder for universities to fulfill their mission with burdensome language policing mandates?

Cathy Harp
Denison isd
Sherman, TX

We are not even able to be even with the cost of living , we need a raise and I want to retire soon, but can't.
Blessings, cathy

Claudia Medina
self
AUSTIN, TX

I oppose SB 17 and urge you oppose it as well. I attended many programs still in existence at UT Austin such as but not limited to World of Engineering, Minority Introduction to Engineering and TexPrep. Without attending these programs I would not had the confidence and support to reach my goal of completing my education in electrical engineering. These programs and programs like these should continue to be supported by all means possible.

As a women and an electrical engineer and a mother to a future female engineer I can tell you that there is a need for increased diversity in the tech industry to spur innovation and equity. DEI programs across all institutions of learning should be protected! Disabling DEI programs will have a detrimental impact to increasing and supporting diversity in all industries for generations to come.

Cary Cordova, Dr.
Self / I am a professor
Austin, TX

My name is Cary Cordova, and I'm speaking for myself as a private individual, to testify against SB 17. As a professor of American Studies at The University of Texas at Austin, I have witnessed firsthand how Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) initiatives have expanded access to higher education for students and faculty. DEI Initiatives help cultivate spaces for a wide variety of students and faculty that have struggled historically for access to education. DEI offices contribute to the intellectual vibrancy of the university. Eliminating these offices wholesale not only discounts the positive work that has emerged from DEI initiatives, but it also is being done without any structures to support some of our most vulnerable students. DEI fosters inclusivity for all, not a few, and dismantling it will hurt people, limit access to funds for our students and research, and make Texas universities far less competitive for students and faculty. Please do not support this action against building an inclusive university and vote against SB 17.

Astrid Kattwinkel
self
DECORDOVA, TX

I'm against this proposed bill because it is ludicrous; my understanding is that if this bill becomes law, the DEI (Diversity, Equity and Inclusion) offices on Texas college campuses will shut down and training and hiring practices based on race, ethnicity, gender identity, and sexual orientation would be banned. This simply doesn't make sense; I'm not sure how we can increase diversity by removing policies and offices that actually work to promote diversity. Frankly, this state needs A LOT more diversity, not less!

Cynthia Dwyer
The Tarrant Together Project
Fort Worth, TX

I am writing to say that I opose this bill.

Abigail Russell

Self, student

Houston, TX

As a Texan the thing I am proudest of is our education system. I feel SB 17 would be severely detrimental to the quality of education and makes me worry the degree I would get here would be seen as less meaningful to employers. I am absolutely against SB 17.

Aaron Boehmer

Self

Austin, TX

As a student and resident in Austin, TX, I fully and unequivocally oppose SB 17, which aims to ban many diversity, equity, and inclusion programs and offices in higher education. Diversity, equity, and inclusion are essential to education, both within programs/initiatives and as guiding pillars as a means of protecting the freedoms and rights of all students, staff, and faculty. Closing diversity, equity and inclusion offices and banning other initiatives would make people from underrepresented groups feel less welcome. This ban would halt efforts to promote progress in terms of representation, equity, and inclusiveness. This ban would also undo ongoing efforts to correct historic and contemporary discrimination against Black and brown communities. SB 17 would also make it harder for universities to receive research funding from federal agencies or private organizations that consider commitments to diversity when awarding grants. Diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives aim to increase faculty diversity and help students from all backgrounds succeed, especially those from historically and currently marginalized communities. Banning these initiatives — including but not limited to banning mandatory diversity training and restricting hiring departments from asking for diversity statements — only hurts higher education, making people feel less safe, welcome, and protected at their schools and/or workplaces.

SB 17 promotes inequity, inequality, and racism, all of which we must staunchly and vehemently oppose — and that includes the House Higher Education Committee, the Texas House of Representatives, and the Texas Government at large.

Please do NOT pass SB 17.

John Mckiernan-Gonzalez

self - teacher

Austin, TX

My name is John Mckiernan-Gonzalez and I am writing as a resident, taxpayer and voter here in Texas. I am not writing as a faculty member in Texas State University.

I ask that the members not include amendment 4 to Section 51.352(d) of the education code. The amendment states that "a majority of the members of a search committee for the position of president or other chief executive officer of an institution under the board's control and management are members of the board." First, any search committee should draw from the most capable stakeholders in a university mission, especially those who have devoted their lives and careers to higher education and higher ed administration. Board members have limited terms, though they may all be equally dedicated to higher education as the other committee members. By making board members the majority, it gives a tiny tiny tiny minority disproportionate authority over the sprawling enterprise we call universities. Board members and the board already provide oversight over high level search committee processes. Does the board need to get lost in the weeds of a search committee in their busy lives? Does the legislature need to actively exclude the decades of wisdom and experience high level staff and faculty and student representatives have accrued in their careers in higher education? If board members are present, they should be able to share their experience with other members in the free market of ideas that is a search committee tasked and knowledgeable regarding the needs of governance of a higher education system. Do they need special help from the legislature to convince other people involved in higher education.

Let board members do what board members do: provide oversight and advocacy.

Please remove this amendment from the SB17. It is unhelpful and burdensome to the board, as well as dismissive of the skilled work faculty and administration already do at universities.

Teresa Cuevas

self

Austin, TX

This is an unnecessary and dangerous bill that will send dollars away from the Texas executive by reducing job security and scaring away good workers. Safeguards already exist in the existing state universities systems through regents' rules.

CHUCK HOWARD

SELF

CUERO, TX

DEI FURTHER DRIVES PEOPLE APART AND DOES NOTHING TOWARDS CREATING PRIDE IN CITIZENSHIP. THEREFORE IN MY OPINION SHOULD NOT EVEN BE BROUGHT UP IN A CLASSROOM. OUR OWN AMERICAN AND TEXAS HISTORY IF PRESENTED IN AN UNBIASED MANNER SHOWS THAT AS A SOCIETY WE HAVE MOVED ALONG TOWARDS THE GOAL OF "ALL MEN CREATED EQUAL IN THE EYES OF THE LORD". TEACH TRUE CIVICS AND DO SO IN ALL LEVELS OF STUDY. DEI DOES NOTHING TO EDUCATE OUR SCHOOL AGED YOUNG PEOPLE ABOUT OUR COUNTRY, AS HAVING A CIVIC DUTY AND THE PRIDE THAT GOES WITH "BEING AN AMERICAN". CHUCK HOWARD

Nicholas Grammer

Self, student

Austin, TX

I do not support the passage of SB 17. Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion programs support all students at public universities and by ridding of them, we are doing a disservice to all students. As a student at UT Austin, I have seen how diversity is an essential part of learning. Without diversity in ethnicity, race, gender, background, we lose different perspectives that benefit the learning environment. DEI programs also provide many valuable resources to under represented groups on campus and the removal of these programs could be detrimental to these communities. Furthermore, the punishments are outrageous. A professor losing tenure and being put on academic probation of 5 years is an extraordinarily harsh punishment, especially when those that advance DEI principles simply want the best for the students they represent and the best for the universities as a whole. Please do not pass SB 17.

Holly Parker

Self / Research Analyst

Cookville, TX

DEI policies are inherently bigoted and discriminative against any person deemed to be part of a majority body (whites, males, heterosexuals, Christians, etc.). This political ideology does not belong in our schools, local governments, or state government. Please ban DEI policies from being implemented across our state. If you do not end the adoption and implementation of DEI, you have embraced a caustic strain of political teaching that will destroy not only the founding principle of equality, but also meritocracy. DEI policies will lead this state to a war of perceived victim and oppression against a perceived oppressor.

Angela Valenzuela, Dr.
The University of Texas at Austin
Austin, TX

Do note the findings of a policy brief that will get presented in today's hearing by Jenna Doane & Maria Unda. Key findings: Key findings

? Empirical data reveals that Texas higher education institutions are systematically excluding Black and Latin* students. Out of 32 higher education institutions analyzed, 20 are failing to graduate, even half of Black and Latin* students.

? As of 2020, at the University of Texas at Austin, the number of White faculty (1,938) was 6.4 times the number of Black faculty (302) and 7.9 times the number of Hispanic faculty (244).

? While the ratio of Black faculty to students improved at The University of Texas at Austin from 2015-2020, the number of Black students enrolled decreased from 1,647 to 647.

? Graduation rates among 33 of Texas' higher education institutions reveal that many Black and Hispanic students are missing some vital resource(s) that would help push them to graduation.

The brief concludes: Additionally, despite the increasing number of Hispanic people within Texas, the consistently low number of Hispanic faculty in Texas universities is detrimental to Hispanic students who would benefit from faculty representation. Instead of removing DEI initiatives, universities should audit search committee practices and decision-making processes to ensure the recruitment of Black and Hispanic faculty into Texas universities. Failure of the Texas legislature to see the underlying issue as not caused by the presence of DEI programs and resources, but the need for an increase in access and removal of barriers to people of color to higher universities through DEI initiatives, creates a "chilling effect." The proposal of policies to "address" a problem that is not thereby removing the only thing that could address the real problems is detrimental to Texas' faculty and students. All students benefit from diversity, rendering the approval of these policies shortsighted and irresponsible.

Isabella Feistauer, Miss
self
Austin, TX

I am against this bill because it will infringe on the integrity of higher education learning. Censoring diversity, equity, and inclusion teachings in higher education classrooms is un-American, as it restricts the dispersal of factual information that is essential to learning about our history and society. This bill's restrictions on what happens in the classroom are deeply partisan and promote fascist ideals of censorship. It damages the ability of Texas students to learn in higher education settings and is an authoritarian overreach of government oversight. For these reasons, I strongly oppose this bill.

Lydia Tressel
self
AUSTIN, TX

By forcing all universities to be neutral in the categories of social, political, and cultural, you will be silencing the diverse voices that students need in higher education. Do not pass this bill. It will be detrimental to an entire generation.

Chris Donofrio

Self

The Woodlands, TX

I strongly oppose SB 17.

The engrossed version and any other versions.

I demand you let it die in committee.

SB 17 represents one of the worst cases of state-mandated intrusion. It's a blatant attempt to impose control based upon extreme, MAGA, Republican ideological views.

It follows the extremist Republican playbook: Create a non-existent moral panic, use it to create fear among people, attack anyone or anything that is/supports this boogeyman, offer an easy solution.

Even if it violates existing law, is unconstitutional, or causes harm.

SB 17's moral panic is found in the bill's analysis.

"Texas hosts world class institutions of higher education that are as diverse as the state itself. However, certain Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) practices are polarizing and work against the goal of inclusion. S.B. 17 prohibits universities from establishing or maintaining DEI offices, officers, employees, or contractors that perform the duties of a DEI office. It also prohibits requiring certain training and ideological oaths."

The cited diversity is a direct result of DEI. Any polarization is due only to "ideological oaths" required by politically extreme Republicans and their supporters.

SB 17 contradicts existing portions of Sec 51.352: Responsibility of the Governing Board, 51.352 (a).

"(1) is expected to preserve institutional independence and to defend its right to manage its own affairs through its chosen administrators and employees;"

"(2) shall enhance the public image of each institution under its governance;"

"(4) shall nurture each institution under its governance to the end that each institution achieves its full potential within its role and mission;"

The governing board are not elected. They are not accountable to the people.

It consists of 9 members appointed by the Governor. The Governor appoints 6 during a term. Their only accountability is to the Governor.

Our higher education policies are thus reflective of political ideologies.

Under 51.352 (a) (5) (e) this can easily lead to corruption and conflicts of interest.

The fear and its solution are fully addressed in the amendment to current law: 51.3525 (p2 L9 - p6 L10).

SB 17 eliminates DEI offices: 51.3525 (b), p3 L8-12.

SB 17 redefines DEI to include other categories: gender identity and sexual orientation. 51.3525 (a) (4) (p3 L1-3)

SB 17 designates the Attorney General as the final compliance enforcer. (p3 L5-6)

SB 17 imposes punitive action against accreditation agencies if they take "adverse actions" due to compliance. (p4 L12-19)

I strongly oppose SB 17.

I demand you let it die in committee.

Respectfully,

Chris J. Donofrio

Sherry Johnson, Mrs.

self

Granbury, TX

I am AGAINST this bill because it bans Diversity Equity and Inclusion in higher education institutions.

Quynh-Huong Nguyen
Woori Juntos and Self
Houston, TX

My name is Quynh-Huong Nguyen, I am a Senior Communication Associate for Woori Juntos and current doctoral candidate. I'm here to testify against Senate Bill 17.

As a first generation college student and former student affairs professional, I have personally experienced the transformative impact of diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives (D.E.I.) on college campuses. During my time working in higher education for 5+ years, I had the opportunity to facilitate 150+ intersectional training and education materials per academic year that aimed to create an inclusive environment for all students, staff, and faculty, including those from marginalized communities. Many of these people showed up on their own accord!

Through these initiatives, I witnessed firsthand the positive impact of D.E.I on our campus communities. Students, staff and faculty, who previously felt excluded and marginalized, now had access to resources and programs that helped them feel supported and valued. Students, staff and faculty, who were previously unaware of issues facing underrepresented groups, gained a greater understanding and empathy for their experiences and how they can support their community.

Research shows that a diverse and inclusive campus community benefits everyone, regardless of their background. Studies have found that diverse campuses have higher rates of student retention and graduation, improved critical thinking skills, and increased cultural competence among all members of the campus community.

But it's not just about me - numerous studies have shown that diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives have positive effects on student outcomes, such as academic success, sense of belonging, and mental health. These initiatives also benefit staff and faculty, creating more inclusive work environments and enhancing their ability to effectively serve students from diverse backgrounds.

If Senate Bill 17 were to pass, it could have serious negative consequences in the long run. It may limit the ability of governing boards to invest in and support these vital initiatives, which could lead to decreased enrollment, retention, and success rates for marginalized students. It may also create an environment that is less inclusive for students, faculty and staff, leading to difficulties in recruitment and retention.

Therefore, I urge you to consider the important role that diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives play in our universities, and to vote against Senate Bill 17. Thank you for your time and consideration.

References

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Trenton Mosby
self
Lufkin, TX

DEI allows for a black male like myself to feel comfortable at a university like UT Austin. Considering the fact that the institution has obvious institutional racism. DEI allows me to have a voice over the policies meant to hold me back, it allows me to have opportunities I would never obtain without, it has allowed me to find a community within organizations for people of color. Please do not pass SB 17 because it will result in a decline of inclusiveness and comfort in public institutions. I beg of you to please reconsider.

Danai Munyaradzi
The University of Texas at Austin
Prosper, TX

As a Black female at a historically White institution, I am constantly having to prove myself and everyday I'm reminded of how racist the system continues to be. DEI has been a big part of my experience in higher education, and stripping that aspect away from many minority students and faculty would only take us back rather than forward. DEI allows me to find community and it allows me to have my voice be heard. Please take this into consideration, as many students count on DEI to feel like they belong.

Jerry Chappelle
self - retired Public Affairs Official
Granbury, TX

Gov. Abbott wants to see Texas public universities rise in national rankings. The anti-DEI bills will do the opposite. The smartest students on the planet don't live in Texas, but they like to get their education here. These bills say, hey, you are different, you aren't welcome here. Move up to the 21st century, look at the population. Who is going to fill the jobs in technology that Abbott wants to create? Who is going to do needed research for universities? Not the current crop of drop-out, truants, low test scores. The smart kids are going out of state. You are making it worse.

Daisy Garcia
Self
Denton, TX

Dear House Committee on Higher Education:

I have been following the passage of SB17 by the Texas legislature, in which I am strongly in opposition of. There is a clear lack of understanding of what Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) actually is. DEI has been lump summed into political rhetoric that has caused a misinformed perception of it, with complete disregard to the positive effects that DEI has for the people of Texas.

Supporters of the bill believe the opposite of what DEI really is, they say DEI is discriminatory, exclusive, and creates divisions. DEI offices seek to build an inclusive and welcoming environment for everyone. DEI offices eliminate barriers by creating law-abiding policies and procedures for marginalized communities that experience exclusion in all aspects of themselves; including but not limited to: Military/Veterans status, disabilities, first-generation college students, - not just based on race, color, ethnicity, gender identity or sexual orientation. Removing barriers is not discriminatory against anyone. Oftentimes, it may feel like DEI creates divisions to those who are part of the majority group (Note: I am not just talking about race/ethnicity). To understand this you have to consider the perspective of the minority group – that in which DEI is meant for and brings together, not apart. You can only fully understand what this feels like if you have ever been the minority in a room full of people that are alike.

I am a proud Texas native, Mexican-American first generation immigrant and college student. The trainings, programs, and activities that I personally experienced as a student (that have the potential to be eliminated) allowed me to be included, helped me obtain my Associates, Bachelors and Master's degrees as well as develop my cultural competence in order to work better with people of various backgrounds.

There's so much more I want to write, but I honestly do not know if writing this letter is going to make any difference, based on what I have seen I grudgingly know this overly politicized bill is going to pass. I would just urge you to make this bill make sense, by not eliminating DEI Offices in their entirety. Instead, work with higher education institutions to help provide a framework and benchmarks, so that they may continue their efforts in providing an inclusive experience for future Texas graduates.

I appreciate you reading this and considering my opinion, so that we can move Texas forward and not backward. Also thank you for allowing us to comment virtually, this option helps this process be more equitable.

Sincerely,
Daisy Garcia

Marlene Lobberecht

self/ retired teacher

Houston, TX

I believe in a Texas where all Texans have the opportunity to pursue an inclusive, honest, and quality higher education. Today, I'm you to vote NO to Anti-DEI and Censorship legislation (SB 17 and SB 18) that harms students, faculty, and Texas' academic and economic goals.

May Nguyen

self, physician educator

Houston, TX

Today, I'm asking you all to vote NO to Anti-DEI and Censorship legislation that harms students, faculty, and Texas' academic and economic goals. In addition, these bills are harmful to people's social, emotional, and physical well-being. I believe in a Texas where all Texans have the opportunity to pursue an inclusive, honest, and quality higher education.

I work at a medical school with a social mission to develop a physician workforce with backgrounds representative of the state we live in. Our goal is to prepare future physicians to address health disparities that disproportionately affect historically marginalized populations. Without the ability to attract high quality faculty, we cannot help all Texans be healthy.

I am asking you all to say NO to SB 16, 17 & 18. By saying "NO!" to these bills, you are creating a vision of Texas where students and teachers feel safe and welcomed, where curiosity and critical thinking are cultivated, and where every student can thrive. Thank you for your time!

DANIELLE HOPKINS

Self

Houston, TX

Diversity equity and inclusion are essential to higher education and learning. It is what allows us to learn and grow and what makes higher education worth it. It is what leads to new academic discoveries and inventions that benefit us all. If taken away the implications would go far beyond the college and university campuses and harm the entire great state of Texas. Please do not pass this bill

Lulama Brown

Self. Student at the University of Texas at Austin

Austin, TX

As part of the 5% of Black student at UT, getting rid of DEI leave myself and my other Black peers without a space to embrace each other and find a sense of belonging ESPECIALLY at a PWI that claims that they care about diversity.

Aria R

Self - UT Austin College Student

Pearland, TX

I would like to keep this short and sweet because after interning in the legislature I understand the power of words. Please do not pass along SB 17, as it is detrimental to my potential success at The University of Texas at Austin. I attend a college institution that was not originally made for me, and in turn my life at this institution has been made harder in many ways. For example, people assume that I only got into UT because I am black when I truthfully, I am likely a more qualified student than they are. Secondly, I deal with racism and micro-aggressions on a daily basis, and many times I am asked "what sport do you play?" which is essentially the same as saying I am not smart enough to get into UT on my own, and that I need to be giving back to the University by way of athletics to succeed. The programs that are supported under DEI like The Multicultural Engagement Center (and the advisors within the space), The Fearless Leadership Institute (a wellness group for Black women on campus), and many more programs have allowed me to feel so supported on campus. These spaces do not interfere with anything else, and these spaces allow me a safe space on campus, a place where I feel seen, heard, and equally represented, a place where I feel like I matter. Please do not take these spaces away from me, I beg you not too.

Will Francis

National Association of Social Workers-Texas

Austin, TX

The following letter is on behalf of a group of faculty:

We are a group of social work educators and practitioners writing as individual citizens to express our concerns about proposals under consideration in the Texas House of Representatives that would suppress open discussion of issues related to diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) in our educational programs and in our classrooms. We are specifically concerned about the impacts of Senate Bills 17 and 18, as well as the budget rider which limits state funding for diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts at Texas' public universities. These proposals, individually and in combination, are in direct conflict with the ethical practice guidelines required of the social work profession and of social work educators and risk our ability to effectively teach social work practice in Texas.

Diversity, equity, and inclusion are embedded in the National Association of Social Workers Code of Ethics. Further, diversity, equity, and inclusion are foundational concepts, critical to social work education. We are concerned about the effects of these bills and the budget rider on the ongoing accreditation of professional social work programs in Texas. Currently there are 54 accredited social work programs at the undergraduate and graduate level in our state. The national educational accreditation standards from the Council on Social Work Education stipulate that social work education must demonstrate how it addresses diversity, equity, and inclusion across the various aspects of our program, including curriculum, program administration, and the student learning experience. Failure to do so would jeopardize program accreditation. And while we write specifically about social work accreditation, diversity, equity, and inclusion are also key components of accreditation standards in other professional fields like nursing and medicine to deepen our understanding of social determinants of health.

As social work educators and practitioners, we have a professional responsibility to assist the diverse clients and communities across the state who need our services and to support them in addressing social, economic, and environmental challenges they may face. This requires having academic freedom within our educational settings to freely discuss the causes and consequences of exclusion, marginalization, and oppression, all of which would be severely limited should these bills be enacted into law.

Social work faculty across Texas must have the freedom to speak honestly about diversity, equity, and inclusion to help our students build their professional competencies and how these facets influence their work with clients across the state. All of our professional work should be grounded in celebrating diversity, pursuing equity, and enhancing inclusion and belonging. Social work faculty across the state should not have to risk losing their jobs to teach according to our profession's ethics and accreditation standards.

Patricia McNeely, Mrs.

self

Lipan, TX

This is Unamerican. We are a diverse country and all students deserve an education if they desire it.

Trinity Dow
University of Texas at Austin
Austin, TX

Good Evening all. I am Trinity Dow, a current senior at the University of Texas at Austin studying rhetoric and writing and I will be testifying against SB 17.

Through the DDCE (division of diversity and community engagement) sector of UT Austin I was blessed with the opportunity to study abroad in Cape Town, South Africa at the University of Cape Town. Because the program catered to black and brown students and also those of lower income communities, three historically underrepresented identities on college campuses, our program directors did three things that were unique from other abroad programs at UT Austin.

First, Program directors held multiple meetings before the application deadline to aid students in understanding the UT Abroad portal, what it means to travel abroad, how to fill out the applications including essay tips and strategies, a chance to hear the testimonies of other students who'd already been abroad so we were able to see how attainable traveling the world really was, and most importantly how to successfully fund a study abroad program. It was not us against them, instead we worked alongside directors, as a TEAM, to make sure we made our way to Cape Town.

The second initiative they took was to create opportunities abroad in Africa specifically. As an African American unaware of my specific roots, going to Africa completely altered my idea of what it meant to be black. I saw that though we are minorities in the US, we are a global majority. It gave me a sense of pride in my culture and identity. This trip also dismantled negative beliefs regarding the African continent and its people, and gifted us the opportunity to slowly, but surely rebuild the broken connections between Africans and the African diaspora.

Lastly they gave us an opportunity to dream. When I got to South Africa every limiting belief I placed on my dreams, from not being about to afford a healthy lifestyle for myself after school, not be able to see the world, not being capable of curating international change, and any cap I placed on my dreams I'd left doormat as a consequence of my sometimes harsh reality, disappeared. The first thing I felt touching Cape Town soil was how Dr. Leonard Moore and Dr. Devin Walker, two black faculty members dedicated to black and brown students on campus, told us anything was possible and meant it. This program transformed me from a scared first generation student, unsure if I would even finish college or how, to an over achieving scholar dedicated to change in my community fearlessly going after my goals, hoping to not only meet but to surpass my previous exceptions. I will never forget how DDCE changed my life through this global travel opportunity that was financially accessible. Thank you.

Jesse Hartley
University of Houston
Houston, TX

My name is Jesse Hartley and I am a social work PhD student at the University of Houston. I am testifying in my personal capacity and am writing to share my opposition to S.B. 17. As a white woman, I want to direct my testimony to the white women who are considering this bill. Let's take affirmative action as just one example of a DEI program. When people hear the term affirmative action, they immediately focus on perceived advantages based on race. The reality is, white women have been the biggest beneficiaries of any demographic of affirmative action. And yet, white women are some of the fiercest opponents of affirmative action and other DEI programs. This contradiction isn't new - historically white women have fought for OUR rights on the backs of and to the exclusion of women of color. Instead of working in solidarity with others, white women have dutifully fallen in line with white male counterparts. Whether it is white women authoring legislation like this, or white women who are silent on these matters, we are choosing to align with white patriarchy to the detriment of vulnerable populations. And since I know I can't rely on empathy to sway some of you, just know that when the time comes for your rights and protections to be stripped, the white men pushing this legislation won't be defending you like you are defending this incredibly harmful bill. As a current student in higher education, I can assure you I am not being "indoctrinated" as the fear mongering would lead you to believe but rather, I am having my mind opened and my views expanded. Personally, I am immensely grateful to learn with and from people who challenge me to grow both personally and professionally. Thank you for your time and again I ask you to vote against SB 17.

Cynthia Miller

Self

Lubbock, TX

I strongly urge you to oppose this bill. I have seen no evidence warranting even the development of this bill from the author or anyone else, and I have asked for it and got no response. This will damage higher education in Texas beyond what you can even imagine on this economy. If you haven't checked with higher education, you should because they are now struggling to get top professors to come here and high-scholar students are pulling their applications from our universities. Is this the intent of this bill?

Jaslin Wesley

self - UT AUSTIN STUDENT

Houston, TX

SB 17 is an attack on the diverse and multifaceted state of Texas. Students need resources and tools to adjust the educational disparities caused by predisposed prejudicious history of this state. DEI programs reduce these disparities and are not unequal advantages to the other students of Texas. DEI programs like UT's MEC AND AAA have held several events that have not only increased black enrollment but made black students feel much more comfortable and thrive at a university that worked against people that looked like them for centuries. Enacting this bill would erase years of work that UT's DEI industry have done to increase black and hispanic enrollment while educating and making it's other students more worldly and suitable for jobs by working with people from different backgrounds. This bill not only affects students of color but other students as well as they will not be prepared to face the diverse nation of America and come to terms with the history of discrimination that plagues this country, making them more ignorant and less ready for the real world

Malik Crowder

self

Pflugerville, TX

I strongly reject SB 17. This anti DEI bill would take us back to discrimination at the universities and make students of diverse backgrounds second class citizens. We need inclusive and diverse programming, staff, faculty, students and administrators to educate the whole state of Texas and beyond. The benefit of these DEI programs are to recruit, retain and graduate students from across the state, the country and the globe. Students thrive when their culture, identity and gender are celebrated all over campus, in the classroom, through research, study abroad, alumni network and professional internships and job placements. Partisan leaders of this anti DEI legislation do not understand the programs, events, and support students from various communities receive on campus. Texas universities deserve the power, funding and authority to provide a welcoming and respectful campus that respects all cultures of Texas, the country and the world. The cost for our flagship and other state funded universities is that we would lose top talent to other research one universities where inclusion, diversity, respect and support is valued. Let's continue the success of Texas universities being world class, producing top scholars of all genders, race, identity and talent. We have been successful recruiting, retaining and graduating top talent at our Texas universities. I support a strong no vote on SB 17. Let's go forward and progress let's not return to the pre Brown v Board era.

Cherise Smith

Self, professor

Austin, TX

My name is Dr. Cherise Smith, and I speak for myself as a private individual. I oppose SB 17. I am also a Professor of Black Studies and Art History at the University of Texas at Austin where I chair the department of African and African Diaspora Studies and executive direct the Art Galleries at Black Studies..

Art History is often associated with the extremely wealthy and with dilettantes. I'm a first generation college graduate, first generation to attain graduate degrees. I earned what were then called graduate minority fellowships. These DEI initiatives professionalized me and allowed me to establish my career in the top museums in this country, including the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Art Institute of Chicago, and the San Francisco Museum of Art. These and other arts organizations understood then and they understand now that, in order to survive and thrive, we need a diverse workforce; we need audiences who come from all walks of life; and we need to represent the plurality of human ingenuity. So, in my career, I have fought against those stereotypes, and I have fought for making art museums accessible to all people.

I was drawn to Art History because I believed and continue to believe that art and museums belong to all people. When I say all people, I mean urban elites and rural everyday people, low-income and high-earning people. The arts industry, like all other industries, needs educated individuals, regardless of ethnic, racial, gender or class background, to participate. I was also drawn to Art History because it's a humanities discipline that combines attention to history, economics, and representation. Art History instills in students critical thinking and critical looking skills that allow them to be discerning in our increasingly image-based, media-driven society and to track how power flows. People with Art History degrees go on to be curators in museums and professors in universities, but they also go on to work at Meta/ Facebook and to be fundraisers for non-profit organizations. Art History, like other disciplines in the arts and humanities, teaches skills that all people need to thrive in and contribute to industry and technology. In my 18 years in teaching at UT, I've only advised one male graduate student. In the field of the Arts, DEI means fostering low-income, working- and middle-class people and men to participate. DEI's not just about people of color and the LGBTQ community. DEI is about equity and fairness to get all people educated so they can participate productively in society and power the economy. That's why I oppose SB 17. Thank you.

Izabella De la Garza

Self

Austin, TX

Representatives,

My name is Izabella De la Garza. I am representing myself and am against all versions of SB 17 until it explicitly states it will support DEI in higher education. I am a Mexican American woman from Universal City Texas, a suburb outside of San Antonio. I just graduated from UT this Saturday with degrees in government and Mexican American and Latina/o Studies and a certificate in Public Policy. I was the co-director of operations for the Latin Community Affairs as well. While I'm celebrating my graduation, I am also defending the programs that molded me into the college student I became. I cannot express enough how disappointed I am in this bill even being considered. Being a Latina from the San Antonio area, I had to take time to adjust to the new environment that was UT Austin. Needless to say, it was different from what I was used to. I found comfort in our DEI office through the Multicultural Engagement Center, LCA, and all of the people we worked alongside. I found community and formative experiences in my four years. I became a better person because of DEI.

I think we all agree that DEI does not do enough. However, the solution is to support it more, not to get rid of it. DEI needs more funding and support from the government, which is at risk now with this legislation. It is better to have it than to not. I fear the results of not having it, and how students like me and not like me would adjust to a different experience, such as moving for college. I'd like to emphasize that DEI supports people of all races and ethnicities, genders, sexualities, religions, veteran, people from rural communities or low income backgrounds, immigrants, international students, people with disabilities, and more.

I'm also disappointed to see the lack of planning for this bill. It is scary to hear, to my knowledge, that there does not seem to be an alternative for DEI offices if this bill passes. I did just graduate, however I understand enough to say that this is just bad policy. I get the impression that we all like diversity and inclusion, at the least. I also support equity. I worry what the plan would be to support at least diversity and inclusion, and equity in ideal circumstances, if DEI offices are outlawed or limited by this bill.

I ask you to please vote against the bill for the benefit of Texas universities and people who would need it. Consider the quality of the policy and the awful things that would result from it.

Thank you.

William Ramirez

Self

Austin, TX

Hi representatives,

My name is William Ramirez, I'm the vice-president of student government at the University of Texas at Austin, and I'm here to represent myself and not any other organization. And I strongly oppose SB 17.

A few weeks ago Senator Miles asked me, "is education the great equalizer?" And I said, "yes." After some time reflecting on education, Diversity, equity, and inclusion, I believe that education is the great equalizer. However, this stands to be in danger when legislation like SB 17 impedes on how we reference race, gender, color, and ethnicity in our programs. Especially when it begins to attack Diversity offices, an office that benefits students who are first-gen, low-income, students of color, veterans, and a variety of students who typically are not represented in higher education.

I'm angry because education is supposed to be the great equalizer, it's our key to liberation. It is my key to be free from poverty, it's my key to endless limitation.

And yet, there are those who seek to restrict and hinder the very tool that could uplift and empower marginalized communities.

I'm tired of having legislators change the locks to my education and liberation when I am presented with a key through diversity programs.

I am so tired of hearing that DEI is indoctrinating students. I'm tired of having the history and experiences of brown and black students erased. I'm so tired of being seen as a threat when we are given the spotlight to shine.

I stand with diversity offices, and programs, because they are the light that allow students like me to bloom their pedals and the light we grow too. I stand with Diversity, equity, and inclusion because that's the only manner education can be the great equalizer.

Emily Eby French

Self, Attorney

Austin, TX

I am an alumnus of the University of Texas School of Law, and my parents are both alumni of Texas A&M University. Longhorns and Aggies can't agree on much, but all three of us benefitted immeasurably from going to school with people who are different from ourselves. DEI initiatives do not only benefit students of color! They enrich all of our lives by bringing a variety of thoughts, experiences, and viewpoints into Texas classrooms. Getting rid of DEI would make Texas a pariah state and ward off the best professors of ALL backgrounds. The Great Texas Brain Drain does not have to begin on September 1, 2023. This committee has the power to vote down this disastrous bill. Please use it!

Starr Martin, Student

Self

Missouri city, TX

Diversity results in a better education for students because they learn about different ways of thinking. Getting rid of initiatives that promote diversity will hurt students emotional intelligence. My name is Starr Martin and I am voicing my disapproval of SB 17. Do not let this bill pass.

Aditya Namjoshi
Self, Engineering Student
Austin, TX

Dear Texas Lawmakers,

As an engineering and history student at UT Austin, I ask you to vote no on SB-17, and protect initiatives that promote diversity, equity, and inclusion on our campus. These initiatives benefit and protect students like me, and they were a big reason in my decision to attend the University of Texas at Austin over other schools that did not have a culture of celebrating student diversity. DEI offices are critical to helping all students feel like they belong on the UT Campus.

These offices contribute towards making the UT population more representative of the diversity of our beloved great state of Texas, and also encourage funders outside the university who value diversity and inclusion to invest in our programs, students, and communities. I guarantee you, without the commitment to DEI, so many opportunities for job and career advancement that UT students benefit from (thereby benefiting the rankings and perception of the university) stem from our robust diversity and inclusion programs that attract leading companies in the industry to recruit from our school.

I have countless stories of students who chose to attend this university because of the amazing DEI initiatives at our university. It is precisely because of the DEI initiatives, in fact, that the extraordinary achievements of all students are recognized and valued in campus spaces. By shutting down DEI offices, you would be stifling students' abilities to contribute to and speak freely about their experiences on the UT campus.

If you pass this bill, you will lose the trust and loyalties of the brilliant students, professors, staff, and parents who make this university great, and who change the world with their entrepreneurial and driven spirit. If UT is to provide a world-class education, it must preserve its commitment to welcoming and celebrating its own diversity.

Hannah Winkler
Self, Project Manager
Austin, TX

I'm Hannah Winkler & I'm speaking for myself. I oppose SB 17. DEI programs on college campuses are critical. If anything, they should be encouraged and expanded. They have far-reaching impacts on creating inclusive college campuses for everyone. As one of my mentors has said: "No student is required to participate, but ALL students benefit from having access to DEI support structures & peer communities when needed." Without DEI programs on college campuses, we will discourage incredible STEM talent from entering that critical workforce. Eliminating DEI programs will weaken Texas' STEM workforce and make Texas colleges much less appealing to the best and brightest students out there.

Janeva Wilson, Student
Self
Austin, TX

I oppose SB 17. Listen to faculty, listen to students. DEI is integral and vital to student success. Education should not be politicised, which is what is happening with this legislation. If diversity matters, as this legislature has claimed, it is illogical to ban offices supporting it. You will be remembered in history by your decisions today. Choose to be on the side of student support and success.

Alison Kafer
Self, professor
Austin, TX

I oppose SB 17 for many reasons, but I will focus on its negative impact on disabled students and faculty.

DEI initiatives are key to the success of disabled people. When we encounter access barriers on campus, DEI offices help us identify the proper channels for eliminating those barriers. Those same offices develop policies that protect us from discrimination and provide faculty with resources so that we may be more effective teachers. DEI trainings also play a central role in sending the message that disabled people belong on campus. While the ADA offers many protections, without DEI trainings, disabled students and faculty often do not know about the protections available to us.

A colleague and I just received an external grant of almost \$600,000 to develop a mentoring network for disabled people at UT Austin. We received that grant because of the DEI infrastructure at UT, particularly the existence of an equity council for disabled faculty and a disability cultural center, both of which were made possible by “diversity offices and employees.”

While SB 17 doesn't mention disability in its language, it will definitely have a negative impact on disabled students and faculty. Research consistently shows that members of minoritized groups—women, people of color, LGBTQ people—are more likely to have disabilities and chronic illnesses and less likely to have the needed resources to address them. DEI initiatives intended to address racial and gender equity and inclusion are essential to the success of disabled people.

Please do not limit DEI and make it more difficult for people who already face significant barriers to succeed.

Jonathan Truxillo
Self
Austin, TX

My name is Jonathan Truxillo, a current 4th year at the University of Texas at Austin. All of my education has been through Texas public schooling. I am writing to express my strong opposition to the proposed amendment to the Education Code, specifically section 3 in SB 17. As a governing body, I'm deeply concerned and disappointed in the credibility of supporters who have not debated real arguments with substantial evidence. Please recall Section 21.061 of the Texas Labor Code relating to insufficient evidence. A DEI office without funding is not an attractive feature of an institution as a minority applicant. I previously served on the board of directors of a 501(c)(3), working with premedical and medical students of color. Oftentimes, DEI offices are the first line of support for students of color. SB 17 also impacts business decisions and the perceived lack of support to organizations from an institution's ability to sponsor conferences, greatly reducing potential economic activity in Texas cities. UT Austin's DDCE was actually the only office at UT Austin that helped me with funding to travel to and attend quarterly board meetings. I also served as President of a student organization sponsored by a DEI office. The student organization plays a large role in advancing the university's strategic plan actually. I'd strongly advise against this subcommittee making long-lasting decisions based on claims that have not gone through the process detailed in the Texas Labor Code, protected by Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. I'd also advise against overestimating the reputation of Texas public schools' ability to recruit minority applicants without sufficient and direct support for minority attendees. SB 17 will deter potential minority applicants away from attending Texas institutions, which is a risk that Texas cannot afford to lose, considering how our numbers have historically been low.

Alexander Vargas

Self / Student

Wylie, TX

As a student at a Texas public university, I support Senate Bill 17 as it was engrossed by the Texas Senate on 19APR2023.

To start, as this bill is written, does not inherently attack a political or religious ideology. In fact, it prevents the university from coercing students to accept an ideology they do not agree with, regardless whether that imposed ideology is conservative or liberal. The only ideology that this bill would suppress is one that rules by force rather than reason. That is, the bill suppresses ideologies that attack individuals and force them to agree "or else." In a republic, individuals need to be able to have a serious discussion and hear things they might not like or agree with. This bill would encourage said dialogue. It does not take sides, only encourages discussion.

Also, in regards to the claims that this bill would disproportionately affect LGBT students. These are absolutely true. This bill would disproportionately affect them. However, this is a good thing, as no other student group has the university support like this group. As an example, public universities cannot promote or provide religious services. However, the moment that a student is gay, then suddenly the university offers them university funded counseling, support groups, etc. unlike any other group. This bill would simply equitize the resources. Note that this bill does not attack student organizations. LGBT students can still form groups for each other, however these wouldn't be funded by the university, just like other student groups.

One thing I was concerned about before reading this bill is that it would ban universities from supplying resources to the physically disabled. After reading this bill, I am glad that the verbiage of the bill keeps Disability resource offices in-tact, as they should be.

In addition, this bill would also ban affirmative action, which is a stain on the United States that hopefully may soon be eradicated. Why is it that a more qualified candidate may lose a position to a less qualified candidate based solely on race or sexual orientation? If segregation/Jim Crow was bad because put a race at an unfair disadvantage, why is it that it is suddenly acceptable when it is called affirmative action? While the preferred race/sexual orientation/etc. has changed, the premise that Jim Crow was built on is completely unchanged: That one race/sexual orientation/etc. can be put above others.

For these reasons, I support SB 17 and encourage the House Higher Education Committee to report favorably on this bill.

Krystal Stroud

Self, Director of Communications at First United Methodist Church of Denton

Denton, TX

I strongly oppose SB 17. Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion programs create space for all people and are absolutely necessary to the wellbeing of students. It would be a complete injustice to do away with DEI and we would lose teachers and students over this. Professors and public school administrators are afraid to share their knowledge and create more inclusive programs and spaces on campus just because SB 17 has been proposed—if it is passed, I cannot imagine how many brilliant educators will flee our beloved state of Texas. Students deserve to be set up for success! DEI programs help their success become a reality. Please, PLEASE oppose SB 17.

Fatima Frausto
Self, Graduate Student
San Antonio, TX

I am writing in opposition to Senate Bill 17 as it is a significant step backward for Texas' higher education institutions. Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) initiatives continue to address the centuries of discrimination in higher education while boosting access and success for all students. DEI statements and efforts in higher education are a reflection of Texan values of fairness and freedom to pursue one's dreams by committing to recruiting and supporting students and faculty that have been systematically denied access to college degrees and academic careers.

As a graduate of UT Austin, UTHealth Science Center Houston, and now a current student at UTSA, I am deeply disappointed to see the state clouding one of its greatest jewels—its higher education system. I am proud to have been a student at these institutions because I believe in the might of Texas' higher education. The growth of Texas' higher education prowess has been due to the increased enrollment of minorities such as myself. To see the state overstep its duties while shirking its responsibilities to properly fund its public universities is incredibly disheartening. I fear the day I will have to tell my children and their friends to apply anywhere instead of staying in Texas.

All Texans seeking higher education deserve access and resources to thrive in higher education. It is appalling to see a state that boasts 7 R1 institutions, several nationally ranked programs, and has produced a bountiful array of research that continues to propel this country forward, should even give this bill the time of day.

I urge the committee to vote NO on Senate Bill 17. It is bad policy, and a waste of Texas' time when there are more urgent matters at hand.

Dundee Lackey, Dr.
Self, Associate professor.
Denton, TX

I thought you all wanted to make Texas universities more competitive. This makes us less able to attract quality faculty, eroding our classes, research, outreach, impact, and reputation. It feels more like a long term game you're playing (to shut down universities? Part of the attack on public education? than something done with reason or out of need. It is another) disservice to the students, teachers, and citizens of Texas, and can only impact our state negatively.

Kristen Garrison
self
Wichita Falls, TX

This effort is antithetical to democratic governance. If there are concerns that efforts to promote equality are creating an unintended backlash against white Texans, then work with the TEA and THECB to promote more balanced attention to difference. Prohibiting efforts to achieve inclusion and equity stands in direct opposition to American values. This bill represents the worst kind of defensive lashing out due to fear and uncertainty.

Andrea Gore
Self (University Professor)
Austin, TX

My name is Andrea Gore, and I'm speaking as a private citizen of TX. I'm also a Professor of Pharmacy at UT-Austin. I'm testifying against SB 17. The bottom line is that abolishing DEI programs will create a workforce disaster for the state as students who feel unwelcome flock to other states. It will also be a multibillion \$ financial disaster.

Here's my story. I wrote a research grant to the NIH that was recently approved for \$7.4 M in funding.

What does this have to do with DEI? Everything.

All major NIH grant proposals are evaluated on a number of metrics: the quality of past research, the significance and potential of the proposed research, the institution (UT-Austin) and the principal investigator's (PI's) qualifications. The proposal I'm referring to, called an R35, requires an explicit commitment to DEI on the part of both the principal investigator (me) and the environment (UT-Austin) - meaning a lab and a university with robust, demonstrable activities related to diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Let me quote from my peer reviewers at the NIH to show how important DEI was in their decision to give me a perfect score. Beyond commenting upon my qualifications as a scientist and the quality of my work, they wrote: "The strengths of the application include ... a significant focus on inclusion and preparation of underrepresented students from diverse communities for next generation independent careers in the environmental health sciences.... An outstanding academic and infrastructure research environment at UT-Austin further ensures appropriate resources towards successful conduct and achievement of the proposed program goals."

In other words, DEI matters to STEM. From my NIH agency, only 4 R35 grants are awarded every two years. I feel confident in saying that I could not have written such a strong DEI component in my grant application, and in all likelihood would not be funded, if SB 17 had been in effect. While decisions about DEI should obviously not be driven by money, SB 17 will have the unintended disastrous consequence of moving the state of Texas's research universities from the top of the rankings to the bottom as we become non-competitive for major federal research funding. This is exactly the opposite of Governor Abbott's goal of making Texas #1 in research.

Jake Wilson
Self - CPA
Fort Worth, TX

I write in support of SB 17, and thank Senator Creighton for authoring it.

I agree with how the bill analysis puts it.

"Texas hosts world class institutions of higher education that are as diverse as the state itself. However, certain Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) practices are polarizing and work against the goal of inclusion. S.B. 17 prohibits universities from establishing or maintaining DEI offices, officers, employees, or contractors that perform the duties of a DEI office. It also prohibits requiring certain training and ideological oaths."

Please pass SB 17.

Thank You,

Jake Wilson
Fightin' Texas Aggie Class of 2010

Andrew Milson, Dr

Self

Plano, TX

My name is Andy Milson and I'm writing to you as a private citizen and not as a representative of any institution or group. I am writing to oppose SB17. SB 17 has already caused significant harm to university students and faculty because it suggests that the government of Texas wants to restrict our liberty, freedom of inquiry, and freedom of expression. I'm a professor of geography at the University of Texas at Arlington. My geography students include military veterans who have traveled to many parts of the world, international students who grew up in other countries, and young men and women from all parts of Texas - urban, suburban, and rural. One of the things that I love about teaching geography is that these students are able to share their diverse experiences as they learn about topics such as population growth, migration, poverty, urbanization, and geopolitics. My students have responded very positively to the opportunity to speak openly about their experiences and to understand their differences and commonalities. This bill would pour cold water on my students by discouraging diverse students from coming to Texas universities and by making them fearful about what they are allowed to discuss in class. Although this bill is focused on offices at the university level, the message is that the government wants to stifle our freedom of expression. Students and faculty are already concerned about what they can and cannot talk about or participate in. This bill must fail. Thank you for considering my concerns.

Jennifer Bates

Self - Seminarian

Denton, TX

I oppose this bill. The state of Texas should not limit universities' abilities to teach and support diversity, inclusion, and equity. Teaching these things strengthens institutions, not weakens them. I learned more that prepared me for real life when I attend a diverse college for graduate school, one that supported all students. Also, the way professors and university professionals are treated, 1 year without pay and then for the 2nd time being black listed, is horrible. We will lose many important thinkers, professors, and educators to other states who don't have laws like this.

KIRK LYNN, Associate Professor

self

AUSTIN, TX

I have already felt the chilling effect of this bill on recruitment of students and faculty. The best students and the best faculty will not come to Texas. There is already oversight in how we spend money and the effectiveness of those expenditures. Misused funds or programs that are abusive are already captured and eliminated. Trust the system and do not buy into trendy fights. This is largely a social media game. It makes me sad and it makes it harder to do the work of research and education.

Anne Nocher, Ms.

self

Dawson, TX

I am sure you are aware that we have entered an age in which the global economy rules. Even local choices. Should you attempt to restrict or hamper education by passing any of the Senate bills 16, 17 or 18, you will immediately restrict the ability of students everywhere in America to be able to address the globalization of the economy. Diversity is globalization. Students from Texas institutions would be handicapped in the comparison to students from other states who have experience in globalization, diversity, and who have been instructed by professors who are deeply and widely versed in the effects of globalization in today's world.

Ask yourselves: do we want Texas students to become the laughingstock of today's job market upon graduation?

Professors of our finest institutions In Texas higher education must be afforded the surety of tenure in order to continue to freely experience the world and communicate that experience to today's students. These bills, 16, 17, and 18, which have only to do with restriction and punishment, censorship and ethnoculturality, have no place in our modern world.

If you are going to ban anything, ban these bills. As a wise friend who is deeply experienced in the ways of the world told me recently, "the irony of all of this is that the only thing we must not tolerate is intolerance."

Please do NOT tolerate any potential action on this bill other than to SCRAP it.

Thank you.

Lisa Moore, Dr.

self

Austin, TX

I urge you to vote against SB 17, which would eliminate nearly all diversity, equity, and inclusion officers, offices, policies and programs at state universities. As a professor at the University of Texas for over thirty years, I remember what it was like before we had clear, informed guidance that allowed us to make sure the people of Texas all had equal access to higher education. With the help of DEI efforts and leaders, we have recruited top-notch faculty and students that we did not have a chance to recruit or retain without these efforts. If these offices are eliminated at Texas universities, hundreds of people will lose their jobs; hundreds of students will lose their financial aid; and higher education in Texas will slip from the Top Ten nationally to a national joke. Please, in the name of all those who take pride in the hundreds of thousands who take pride in their degrees from Texas universities, do not take this radical and unwelcome step. Yours, Lisa Moore

EMMA WATKINS

Self

Austin, TX

I am writing to add my voice to those speaking against SB17. As a graduate student at the University of Texas at Austin, I know how vital DEI frameworks are to the healthy functioning of our school community. Please do not deprive us of these programs which make our schools safer and allow us to learn in a welcoming and inclusive community. DEI is absolutely necessary and must not be stripped away.

Alejandra Martorell

self

Austin, TX

I am hoping to weigh in on the importance of DEI at higher education institutions. DEI is an educational platform in itself. It invites us to ask questions about our rights, needs, and the space we occupy in society. We all need to, or at least we ought to, ask these questions about ourselves, and about our fellow students, faculty, staff, and visitors. It isn't about hoisting some of us higher than others or making up for lost time. It is about not closing the door on nobody's face. Texas, as any state in the country, is made up of a variety of people, with different backgrounds, abilities, world views, needs, and desires. They are all welcome and they all need to be supported according to who they are. (That period is intentional.) Really, there's is no much that needs to be said, except it is a right, a human right, to be heard, to be included, to be one among many. And for that to be possible, we need to hold the standards high. We have to highlight that there have been inequalities and exclusions. DEI is about moving forward and building a more equitable, just world. Please support DEI. We can and must do better.

Jennifer Adair, Dr.

self - Professor of Education

Austin, TX

As a private citizen who works as a professor of education at UT Austin, I am deeply concerned about the negative impact SB 17 will have on student and faculty recruitment and retention. I have lived now in Texas for 15 years. I completed my undergraduate work in Utah, at a conservative religious institution. The teaching and curriculum I had access to were limited with many incredible writers and ideas being banned. I was taught only by white men, with one white woman exception. When I graduated from my undergraduate degree, I was not prepared to work with communities of color and LGBTQ communities. As a white woman, the narrow point of view offered at my undergraduate institution prevented me from being effective in my role as a social worker and educator. I do not want that to happen to students at UT Austin. They are going into jobs and professions that require both an understanding of the world from multiple points of view and an appreciation of diversity. I use many books and chapters in my courses that aim to help educators reach all children in their classrooms. I have seen firsthand what happens when diversity and equity are considered too scary or threatening to teach to white students. I have seen myself and now thousands of students broaden their ideas about people and the beauty of differences and equity. Please do not shortchange white students from having this experience at UT Austin, like what happened to me in my own undergrad experience. We need to support diversity and equity work - to keep a full educational experience alive at UT Austin.

Grace Newman

None

Round Rock, TX

I am opposed to SB 17; Texas will benefit from diversity of thoughts and solutions that are brought by people who bring a variety of perspectives. This is important in colleges and universities. Texas must compete on a global scale and we should encourage and support the people who will help Texas to be successful. Please do not approve SB 17.

Karen Fingerman

The University of Texas at Austin

AUSTIN, TX

My name is Karen Fingerman, and I'm here as a private citizen of TX, taking personal time off from my job as a Professor of Humn Development and Family Sciences, at UT-Austin.

I'm writing to express my opinion against SB 17. My research and leadership roles focus on aging populations in Texas, and it is impossible to conduct this research without consideration of DEI in both the aging population and the scholars who study it. The aging population is increasingly diverse, and it is imperative that faculty in the state of Texas be free to openly discuss DEI issues of dementia, caregiving, and public policy needs in the state.

Likewise, my ability to conduct this research reflects my tenured status. I am free to focus on controversial issues in the field of aging. For example, many scholars believe there is one biological mechanism underlying aging processes, but my research conceptualizes aging as multi-determined by social contexts and opportunities. While many scholars support this perspective, even if they don't, I am able to pursue work that other scholars might consider controversial.

It is vital that we retain these resources to be a top notch public university.

Carmen Zayas
self
Cedar Park, TX

I am a parent of two children who have attended elementary, middle, high school, undergrad and masters in Texas. In this complex complicated global world our children need to be able to understand the richness, history of ALL AMERICANS not just those that are straight white males. We need to teach our children to be critical thinkers. And to be able to solve big issues. they can only do so if they feel valued and appreciated for their heritage; if they understand their culture and others; if they understand the contributions and set backs of different cultures and peoples. By understanding the truth in history - good, bad and ugly, they can start to avoid repeating past mistakes. We have grown as a country in the last 50 years because we understand how much diversity brings to the table. This bill would be a HUGE step BACKWARDS fir Texas, Texans and our future. We would be making our children less global, less diverse in their thinking and less tolerant. EXACTLY what we don't need if we want to continue to grow economy, quality of life and quality of EDUCATION. Additionally, this is a short-sighted bill put forward by those with small minds and who want short term gains for their pocketbook or political party without taking into consideration what is best for majority of our students/kids. Don't sell out our children's futures on the whims of self-interested politicians.
PLEASE VOTE NO ON SB 17

Blanca. Gonzalez., Mrs.
Las Comadres.
Austin, TX

I I'm against SN17 , why ? It eliminate the oppportunity for complete high academic education. It will have a delayed negative impact of students, their city and community.
Therefore, the concequences will be irreparable.
Don't pass, it. Thanks.

Liliana Garces, Dr.

Self, Professor

Austin, TX

My name is Liliana Garces. I am writing as a private citizen of TX, taking personal time off from my job as a Professor of Higher Education at the University of Texas at Austin. I write to oppose SB 17.

Abolishing DEI programs and structures will damage the quality of the education that students at institutions like UT Austin would be able to receive.

I have 12 years of research expertise that centers on diversity, equity and inclusion in higher education and the consensus from decades from social science research is that DEI programming and structures are foundational to ensuring a high-quality education for all students, including white students, and by extension, for furthering the educational mission of UT Austin.

I have learned from my 12 years as a faculty member that all of my students—white students and students of color—greatly benefit from being in diverse learning environments. In my classroom, I have witnessed time and again how encountering a diversity of perspectives and experiences helps students develop critical thinking skills, to gain skills that are necessary to be effective leaders in our democracy, and to overcome racial biases and prejudices.

In fact, decades of diversity- and inclusion-related research consistently shows that DEI programming and support is essential for realizing the many educational benefits of diverse learning environments. Learning from and through diversity requires interactions across racial differences that are meaningful. Ensuring that cross-racial interactions are meaningful requires skill and support. That is precisely what DEI efforts and programming provide.

DEI programming equips faculty and administrators with tools and skills to promote lively discussion, challenge stereotypes, and promote innovation and an expanded range of perspectives and solutions. They help campus administrators and faculty members to facilitate interactions across race and to implement tools in their classrooms that can help students learn from one another. DEI programming helps faculty members become better equipped to address the impediments for productive interactions in their classrooms, such as when there is only one or a few students of color.

I feel confident in saying that I would not be able to provide the same high-quality educational experience that I provide for our students at UT Austin without DEI programming and structures in place at the institution.

I am extremely proud of UT Austin's national reputation and am gravely concerned that if SB 17 passes, not only will it harm my ability to continue to provide a high-quality educational experience for students, but that the university's reputation as a world-class institution will suffer.

Christine Julien

Self, Professor

Austin, TX

My name is Christine Julien. With these remarks, I am representing myself as a private citizen. I am a professor at UT-Austin. I am speaking ON SB 17. I wanted to share some information about what, in my experience, DEI offices at UT Austin do, in particular in engineering.

A significant amount of DEI efforts support pipeline programs that seek to “broaden participation in engineering”. These programs work with K-12 teachers and counselors, parents and students, and community organizations to share what engineering is, what engineers do, what courses students should take to pursue engineering, and what engineering careers look like — information that is not equitably accessible to all students.

If you compare the demographics of all 18-24 year olds in Texas to the demographics of students at UT Austin who choose to study STEM, the differences are dramatic. Addressing the growing workforce need for engineers requires bringing everyone in. Understanding potential causes behind these differences helps craft programs to address them. One goal of these programs is to ensure that every student graduating from a Texas high school is aware of potential careers in engineering and is in a position to successfully study engineering in college if they choose to do so.

DEI efforts on campus support university students towards their individual success. Effective student success programs are attentive to students’ race, gender, ethnicity, first generation status, disability, veteran status, etc. DEI programs tailor advising to students’ backgrounds and experiences and help students develop a supportive community around their studies. DEI programs provide access to career information and opportunities that are relevant to students’ needs and backgrounds.

DEI programs also support the transition of students to graduate study, recognizing that students with different backgrounds and experiences need different support. A student whose parents both hold doctoral degrees may already receive quality advice, while a first generation college student may have little idea and context for graduate study. A student with small children may require flexibility in scheduling their research efforts. DEI programs work to identify, acknowledge, and address these diverse student needs.

Faculty are required to connect their funded research to efforts to expand diversity, equity, and inclusion or to broaden participation in STEM. DEI programs on campus help faculty successfully compete for these funds. This is required across multiple funding agencies, including the NSF, the NIH, and the Department of Energy.

UT Austin is an emerging Hispanic Serving Institution, and it is important to learn how to truly serve this growing population of students. The campus DEI offices find and replicate programs that work at other institutions. DEI offices across the state facilitate cross-campus collaborations to share ideas and best practices to serve all students in Texas.

Francisco Gonzalez-Lima, Dr.

Self, UT Professor

Austin, TX

Support Texas Senate Bill 17 that bans Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) offices and officers.

The DEI system anonymously investigates individuals without possible exculpation. DEI became a system mobilized by university officers and certain gender diverse groups for retaliation against individuals that they want to punish. In particular, abuse of the Title IX anonymous reporting has become a common practice by which gender diverse individuals and university officers denounce faculty as doing "microaggressions" or "sexual misconduct" for simply saying "ladies and gentlemen" or referring to "men and women" in their classes. These Title IX abuses lead to faculty investigations and "cancel culture" and then faculty are mandated to self-censor and undertake indoctrination workshops about gender diversity.

The legislation against DEI and related Title IX abuses is necessary. DEI is a bureaucratic clerical system created to talk more than to do anything positive. It has been used to rebuke and stigmatize many people, especially men (White and Hispanic). DEI diverts enormous amounts of resources in salaries of associate deans of equity and other staff and they do not contribute to equity itself.

Isabel Hamlet, Mrs.

Self - Small Business Owner

Austin, TX

I believe it is outrageous that in today's socio-political climate, anyone would be advocating for eliminating nearly all diversity, equity, and inclusion offices, officers, policies, and programs at Texas' public colleges and universities. Please consider our progress in these areas and realize that if you eliminate these offices, the progress of diversity, equity, and inclusion will be lost.

Carl Jones, Mr

TDP Rural Caucus State Field Coordinator Travis County Precinct 367 Chair

Spicewood, TX

I urge Tx House members to OPPOSE this bill! It would make people from other ethnicities and underrepresented groups feel less welcome. It would enable past discrimination and halt progress toward making campuses more representative of the state's population. Most importantly it would make it harder for universities to receive research funding from federal agencies or private organizations that consider commitments to diversity when awarding grants.

Sen Creighton & his enablers in the Senate are trying to force their own religious & cultural beliefs down the throats of college students and censure faculty members in our great Universities of higher. Universities are centers of education, research and free expression—NOT indoctrination from right wing charlatans like Creighton.

Anne Lewis

Texas State Employees Union CWA 6186

Austin, TX

I'm a proud member of the Texas State Employees Union CWA 6186 and a Professor of Practice at UT-Austin. I have been a faculty member at UT-Austin since 2000. I'm the recipient of the Regents' Outstanding Teaching Award. This year I received the Creative Achievement Award in the Moody College of Communications.

We are told by President Hartzell, who is highly respected on both sides of the aisle, to "hang in there, June will come." What if June comes with an ill wind from our capitol.

SB 18 will go down as a mean-spirited threat to our prestige and recruitment. SB 17 should go down as easily. I find it hard to imagine the hearts of those who oppose these core principles of opportunity for all Texas citizens, academic freedom, and institutional integrity.

In 2020 UT-Austin received the Seal of Excellence as a Hispanic Serving institution when the student population passed 25% and these students proved successful. We are #5 on the College Choice list for 50 Best Disability Friendly Colleges. We are #1 for Student Veteran Affairs. All are housed in the DEI offices at UT-Austin.

We are making long needed strides forward. We need your continued support. You have taken a constitutional pledge to support quality public higher education.

DEI does not threaten the inclusion of white males. Currently with active DEI offices and initiatives since 2017, full professors are 3.6% African American and 5.9% Latinx. These numbers increase to 5.3% Black and 10.4% at Assistant Professor level. Only 35.6% of the women faculty currently are included in the tenured or tenure track category.

The Texas State Employees Union opposes the anti-DEI, anti-CRT teaching, and anti-tenure bills currently in the legislature, even though these are not direct bread and butter issues. Remember, we're the folks who brought you the weekend, ended most child labor, and organized with Dr. King for the 1963 March for Jobs and Freedom. We should have your attention and respect.

We believe it's only collective action that can lead to positive change. We're on-the ground experts and advocates for our students and the educational community. We speak with a loud courageous voice. We are in the fight for social justice, human rights, dignity, and democracy. And we know full well as Frederick Douglass said in 1857, "If there is no struggle, there is no progress." We thank you for the opportunity to struggle.

It's an ill wind that blows nobody any good. This is an ill wind.

Jo Foley
self/none
Henderson, TX

Even in Texas our universities have become 'woke'. Unfortunately, our most famous, UT and A&M, are among the wokest. It is past time that they were reigned in and made to teach curriculum, how to think, not what to think. The DEI departments should be abolished as they censor students and many students feel compelled to say and write as their woke professors tell them to, in fear of getting bad grades or humiliated, if they speak out of feeling differently. I support SB 17.

Emily Salazar, Dr.
Self, retired
Austin, TX

I worked at a university for 25 years. If it had not been for a grant-assisted program providing migrant farmworker students/first-generation college (U.S. citizenship and high GPA required) with financial assistance and resources, they would not have been able to attend college. DEI offices ensured that these students as well as international students felt accepted. I taught Presentational Speaking classes and when the migrant students talked about their background of working in the fields, the rest of the class was excited to engage in discussions about diverse backgrounds. These migrant students had a higher retention rate and graduation rate than other students at the university. One reason they excelled was that their primary goal for attending college was to give back to their home community. Diversity offices ensure that college students are prepared to enter the work world, where they will meet and interact with people from diverse backgrounds. The students can learn about each other in college, the better prepared they will be for life after college.

Andrew Gaudet
self, researcher
Austin, TX

Hi, I am Andrew, writing as a private citizen. I am also faculty at the University of Texas at Austin.

Excluding programs related to DEI will harm Texas and Texans, starting now and lasting for a long time. I'm talking about brains, innovation, and money \$\$

Diversity programs are increasingly required to attract the best funding and the best people. It is getting difficult to attract the best job candidates to Texas – one of the reasons is concerns over DEI initiatives and unnecessary exclusion.

As someone who loves living and teaching in Texas and is raising their children here, I hope to support the success of the state, its students, and everyone here. What a great place to be! One crucial aspect for continuing this excellent trajectory is continuing to allow all Texans to thrive, and to encourage people from all backgrounds to move to our state. Encouraging or allowing diversity initiatives will boost innovation, and amplify the flow of smart people and money into Texas.

I urge you to vote “no” on SB17 and vote for learning, innovation, success, and money.

Eliot Fisher

self, cultural worker and scholar

Austin, TX

I am writing to express my concern about Senate Bill 17, which would restrict the speech of faculty members and staff at Texas public universities.

I understand that the bill's sponsors are concerned about the spread of misinformation and harmful ideas on college campuses. I share these concerns, and I believe that it is important for universities to take steps to address them. However, I believe that Senate Bill 17 is the wrong way to address this issue. The bill would create a chilling effect on free speech, making it more difficult for professors to teach about controversial topics or to express their own personal beliefs. This would make it harder for students to learn about different perspectives and to develop critical thinking skills.

I urge you to vote against Senate Bill 17. I believe that there are better ways to address the spread of misinformation and harmful ideas on college campuses. For example, universities could create more opportunities for students to learn about critical thinking and media literacy. They could also work to create a more inclusive and welcoming campus environment, where all students feel safe and respected. I believe that these approaches would be more effective in addressing the concerns of the bill's sponsors without infringing on the free speech rights of professors and other employees.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sharmila Rudrappa, Dr.

Self, teacher

Austin, TX

DEI initiatives in Texas strengthen US national security. Prohibiting DEI in Texas colleges and universities will also weaken our capacity, as a state, to advance the global interests of the United States.

Let me explain. After World War II, the US government recognized that our security and economic competitiveness depended on American experts who were knowledgeable about world regions, foreign languages, and international affairs. The result was the National Defense Education Act (NDEA), passed in 1958, which funded a nation-wide network of "Area Studies" centers at select American universities.

The University of Texas at Austin was one of the early beneficiaries of this funding. Since the 1950s UT has built a national and international reputation in Area Studies. Today, the university receives approximately \$2.5 million a year from the Department of Education to build and grow area studies centers. We are the only institution in the US south to host centers in European Studies; Russian, Eastern European and Eurasian Studies; Latin American Studies; Middle Eastern Studies; and South Asian Studies.

These centers train students and do research, and facilitate connections across the state, nation, and world. We work with K-12 teachers across Texas on pedagogy. We do research and provide training that bears directly on the present conflict between Ukraine and Russia. We partner with institutions across the world on everything from film studies to disinformation analysis.

This degree of depth and excellence in area studies is now at risk. The Dept. of Education, which administers Area Studies programs, considers institutional support for DEI an important factor in assessing the merits of grant applications. Removing DEI programs at UT will eviscerate our competitiveness in the next cycle of federal grants. This will erode UT's national capacity to deal intelligently and wisely with the rest of the world. The kinds of networks and knowledge that have grown over decades within area studies centers in UT can't simply or quickly be reassembled elsewhere, at other institutions. If Area Studies at UT are defunded, it will represent a net loss for the nation.

The international landscape has shifted dramatically since the programs' birth, which was very much a product of the Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union. But the rationale for supporting U.S. expertise in the many regions and languages of the world has, if anything, strengthened in our present. Dramatic changes in the geopolitical and global economic landscapes since 9/11 continue to create the need for American expertise in foreign affairs.

The removal of DEI erodes the ability of Texans to contribute to national security and global competitiveness. If it occurs, it will be an entirely self-inflicted wound. We need to commit to a broader vision of the role of Texas in the world. If we aspire to be a leader in the world, we need to know the world.

Sylvia Campbell
self, retired teacher
The Woodlands, TX

Dear Members of the Higher Education Committee,

This bill - SB 17 - seems to make the assumption that we are beyond problems of inclusion in our educational system in Texas. This is far from the case. Offices of DEI are critically important to provide not only a student body, but also a learning experience that reflects the diverse population of our very large state. To remove these offices is to deny large portions of our community. It will make Texas a weaker state, not a stronger one. Please VOTE NO on SB 17.

Thank you,
Sylvia Campbell

Marcella Clinard, Dr
Self, diversity staff at a university
Denton, TX

SB 17 is a badly written bill that will chill free speech and negatively impact Texas universities.

Universities must be places of intellectual inquiry where students and employees can openly discuss and educate themselves about all topics, including race, gender, and sexuality. Universities must be places of belonging where all students and employees feel that their identities and cultures are valid and valued. And universities must be places where administration, faculty, staff, and students feel ownership and are invested in actively creating inclusive, vibrant, thriving institutions. These are nonpartisan goals.

SB 17 seeks to politicize and undermine higher education in Texas by copying and pasting Manhattan Institute ideas instead of seeking to understand and support the mission of Texas universities to educate Texans. This is a big government solution to a made-up problem, and the diverse people of the great state of Texas deserve better from their legislators.

Kristin Frazier
Self
Sunrise Beach Village, TX

I strongly oppose SB 17. This bill is focused on the wrong area of our education struggles. As a state ranked near the bottom in the country in education, focusing your attention on the offices and resource centers that expand the breadth of knowledge and resources available to marginalized students is grotesque and a bold miss-use of power.

Do not support this bill in any form.

Jennifer Ebbeler

self

AUSTIN, TX

My name is Jennifer Ebbeler. I am writing to you as a private citizen. I am a tenured Associate Professor of Classics at the University of Texas at Austin, where I have taught for 20 years. I am opposed to SB 17.

I want to explain equity with a very personal story. In 2008, I was diagnosed with a serious autoimmune disease. Since then, I have had many complications to my health. I use medically necessary disability accommodations, as do many of my students. My accommodations cannot fix my health problems. They cannot give me back the life I had before 2008. They provide a bit of extra support in helping me perform my job duties. They do not change my job duties nor do they change how my research, teaching, and service are evaluated. My accommodations give me no advantages. They are not "special treatment." They make significant disadvantages slightly less harmful. They allow me the opportunity to be successful. They do not ensure that I am successful. No bar has been lowered. I am required to do exactly the same things as every other faculty member in my position at UT. The difference is in how I do them--for instance, by teaching my classes in the afternoon when my pain levels are less distracting; or using Zoom for meetings because I am severely immunocompromised. In fact, SB 17 allows for an equity approach to the needs of disabled people and military veterans. Equity should be inclusive of all people, not just a few groups of people.

When I first became disabled, I faced a significant amount of harmful treatment by supervisors and colleagues who did not understand disability and viewed accommodations as "special treatment." I was told I did not "look" like a disabled person. I was accused of "faking sick" when I took medical leaves. I am not a snowflake but I found this treatment difficult and dehumanizing. This is how my students feel when their peers and professors cannot relate to or refuse to try to understand their background or specific life challenges. An awareness of the principles of diversity, equity, and inclusion serves the entire community. It prevents behavior that is unintentionally harmful or even illegal. It helps everyone to be more empathetic towards others: conservatives, liberals, deaf students, Christian students, Jewish students, first generation students, students from rural TX, students from impoverished backgrounds, white students, students of color, etc. The principles of diversity, equity and inclusion encourage me to be aware that my students and colleagues do not experience the world exactly as I do. They encourage my colleagues and supervisors to be aware that, as a disabled person, I do not experience my job or life in the same way as they do. DEI is not divisive. It acknowledges difference and teaches us how to navigate this difference with empathy and awareness, how to come together, acknowledge, and respect difference in our workplaces, local communities, states, and nations.

Julia Mickenberg, Dr.

Self, professor

Austin, TX

When lawmakers call for legislation that ends Diversity, Equity and Inclusion efforts (SB17), that insists teaching be value neutral (SB 16) and that ends tenure (SB18) they might be thinking about people like me: a tenured professor who teaches controversial subjects. But this legislation would be bad for all Texans, of whatever politics. Moreover, it is based on faulty assumptions about what happens in college classrooms, especially humanities classes. Whatever our politics, all of us in Texas need innovators, leaders, and engaged citizens who think for themselves. The subjects I teach (on aspects of American culture) might seem ripe for inserting left-wing propaganda. The subject of my research and publications could raise even more eyebrows, if the assumption is that my research is designed to push a political agenda (it is not). But let me make something clear: although I do research on and even sometimes teach about radicals, in my capacity as a professor and scholar I have no interest in pushing a political agenda, on my students or on anyone else. My job as a humanities scholar is to ask questions, to follow the evidence, and to tell a story that this evidence lets me tell. Scholarly books are not opinion pieces or blogs; my own books and articles were based on years of research and were vetted at multiple stages. As a teacher I train students in skills like asking good questions, learning to evaluate evidence and to use peer-reviewed scholarship. I teach them to refine their arguments (even when they put forth positions with which I might not personally agree) and to become better writers and speakers. I am not teaching them what to think, I am teaching them how to think. In my many years of teaching undergraduates, some of my best students have been conservatives who are open about their views. Others have been liberal. But in both cases these students have told me how much they appreciated what they learned in my classes. I've supported them with letters of recommendation and celebrated their successes. My goal is not to make students see the world the way I see it. It is to equip them with the background and skills to pursue their own questions, to find and evaluate evidence, and to become professionals and contributors to society. There is simply no way that UT will remain "a university of the first class" if Texas gets rid of tenure. SB16 and SB17 will have just as dire if less obvious consequences. If SB 17 and SB 16 (or versions of them), pass the university will not be competitive in a range of major grants, and the efforts at inclusion—which assure that everyone (including conservative students) feels welcome and free to express themselves—will give way to narrow-mindedness and a chilling atmosphere. Universities and colleges will not be able to hire the best scholars and teachers and students won't gain the tools to be innovative leaders, critical thinkers, and engaged citizens. Please do not pass these bills.

Mary Cannon, GRMTHR

self

Spring, TX

Dear House Committee Member,

Vote " NO " on SB 17, because inclusive and equitable institutions benefit everyone. I want my granddaughter to apply to work for you someday because she will make the best employee you may ever, ever have. You can then look her in the eye and tell her you fought to turn the "ONCE GREAT STATE OF TEXAS" back into " THE GREAT STATE OF TEXAS",

With Bills like this top candidates for working in this now loser state will go to other states.

June Xu

Self

Sugar Land, TX

I oppose this bill. This bill took away the fair opportunities from minorities. Due to their background, most ministries do not have the resource that majorities have. Taking away this DEI policy in Higher education will directly affect their opportunities to advance in life.

Ying Jia

Self

Frisco, TX

I oppose SB17. This bill impacts the DEI support for the minority in college. DEI is a very broad concept, which includes women, different race, LGBTQ, veteran, young and so on. The defund of DEI will limit the resource for the minority. A college should be inclusive and diversified to embrace the differences.

Tricia Berry

self

Austin, TX

I'm Tricia Berry & I'm speaking for myself as a private individual. I oppose SB 17. I am an ex-Dow engineer & college DEI program volunteer, Executive Director of Women in STEM at The University of Texas at Austin, Broadening Participation (Diversity) Director for the UT Austin Center for Dynamics & Control of Materials: a National Science Foundation Materials Research Science & Engineering Center, & Greater Austin STEM Ecosystem board member. These entities value DEI, support college DEI programs, & understand the importance of DEI efforts for student success, growth of Texas's STEM workforce, & securing federal & corporate funding.

I am the successful engineer & STEM professional I am today because of DEI programs at UT Austin, ACC, UH Clear Lake & others. Coming from a rural farm town, I was underprepared for UT Austin STEM courses. Thanks to the Women in Engineering Program & DEI programs supporting underprepared students like me, I (and ALL students) had access to free tutoring, a peer network to help me feel like I belonged at UT & in the engineering field, & staff & faculty who supported my academic & professional journey. They supported, encouraged & welcomed me in to get the help I needed to be a successful student & engineer. I benefited greatly from college DEI programs & know the support they provide has far-reaching impacts that create more inclusive & engaging campus experiences for all. No student is required to participate, but ALL students benefit from having access to DEI support structures & peer communities when needed.

As a UT Austin student, I helped found the Women in Engineering Program Evening with Industry to celebrate diversity in engineering & provide space for Texas companies to recruit diverse STEM talent. While designed to increase confidence in women to pursue engineering careers, all engineering students were invited to participate. Since 1993, 300 engineering students from all demographics & 40 companies have participated annually – Dell, IBM, Samsung, Intel, Shell, Dow, ExxonMobil, Texas Instruments & more! Companies depend upon, volunteer with, and fund campus DEI programs to connect with diverse talent & support growing STEM workforce & hiring needs.

I was a student when UT's Women in Engineering Program launched in 1992 and saw enrollment jump to 20% women. With nationally recognized STEM Girl Day & camps reaching 10,000+ K-12th graders annually (20% boys) led by UT Austin Women in STEM, a community to support women entering male-dominated fields, & support from companies seeking to meet STEM hiring and workforce development needs, undergrad engineering enrollment has grown to 30%+ women. We will lose amazing STEM talent without the focused, community-building & support DEI programs provide. Eliminating DEI programs will be detrimental to our Texas colleges and STEM workforce & ability to seek federal/corporate grants & research centers that ultimately support & benefit ALL across Texas and beyond.

Patrick Gilbert, Dr.

Texas Community College Teachers Association; Self
Austin, TX

Dear Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee:

I write to you as Immediate Past President of the Texas Community College Teachers Association (TCCTA), and myself as an educator, in opposition to SB 17. Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, or “DEI,” is not a single clearly defined program, but rather a broad set of policies and practices designed to foster student success, reduce discrimination, and improve institutional life. DEI programs are present on numerous college campuses and they are well-received.

TCCTA strongly disagrees with the premise of SB 17 that DEI policies and offices at institutions of higher education are sources of discrimination or division. We view the work of such offices as very important to accomplishing the policy goals of our institutions, the legislature, and the public, especially as we pursue “Building A Talent Strong Texas.” SB 17 would not only compromise important strategies for broad student success, but would fundamentally destabilize and threaten institutions. The required testimony, audits, and penalties associated with this legislation place a burden on institutions and also puts them on the defensive. An institution may unintentionally violate this legislation and have their funding removed.

I have served on numerous diversity committees, and have attended and organized diversity programming. There has never been an instance in which the programming was malicious. The programming has always been educational. The topics of “race, color, ethnicity, gender identity, or sexual orientation” as mentioned in the bill are addressed by diversity offices because data shows these are topics that warrant discussion. Again, the programming that I have attended and organized has not one time forced anyone to take a position. It has always been about open-discussion and inquiry. If one is not able to learn and ask the hard questions in college, then where else can they do so? College is designed as a place to exchange ideas and learn.

The bill’s restriction on search committee membership concerns TCCTA as well. This severely limits faculty, staff, and other administrative input into the search process, and is in contrast to TCCTA’s belief of shared governance. Selecting a president/chief executive officer is a collaborative process in which all voices must be heard.

SB 17 will impede important programs designed to meet legislative goals, threaten institutions with severe penalties based on vague criteria, and inhibit boards from using their best resources to teach students and staff their institutions. As a result, Texas public higher education may be less competitive compared to other states for talent. I encourage you to visit your local college/university to speak with their DEI offices to learn more about them.

With respect, I submit this testimony in opposition to SB 17.

-Patrick Gilbert
Educator
Immediate Past President, Texas Community College Teachers Association

Georgina Goodnight
Self
Houston, TX

The DE&I programs at Texas public universities are valuable, especially to the STEM fields. We are trying to cultivate a diverse pipeline of engineers and leaders in the energy and chemicals industries. Texas public universities and the engineers that graduate from these institutions play an important role in that pipeline. It would be a shame if we had go out of state to meet our needs to hire a diverse group of engineering grads.

Rachel Furnish

Self, engineer

Austin, TX

I wouldn't have been willing to start or finish my engineering degree at UT Austin if it weren't for the support of the Women in Engineering Program led by Ana Dison and Tricia Berry. This program helped me find my strength and my voice in spite of my doubts and fears, and it & other programs like it continue to do so for countless students and future students at these universities. They are so critical to making the world a better place and losing them due to this bill would cause an immense loss of intellect in Texas as the brightest students are led to universities outside the state where they will be better supported. Please do not pass this bill!!

Alex Wilkie

Self - student

Pflugerville, TX

Banning DEI in higher education is a gross overreach of this governments power and if any school is going to get rid of DEI programs that is a decision that should be made by each institutions board of trustees, not state legislators.

Niloufar Zavareh

Self

Houston, TX

My name is Niloufar Zavareh I am a senior engineer at a pipeline company ensuring compliance to pipeline safety regulations. During my time at UT I used services at UT college of engineering women in engineering program. If it was not for these services me and many fellow female engineers would not have received the support to graduate as engineers. Female engineers are significantly disadvantaged in engineering and programs like this ensure equal opportunities for all students.

Vanessa Talbot

Self - chemical engineer, executive at ExxonMobil

Katy, TX

As a chemical engineering graduate, as female executive leader at ExxonMobil, as a mother of a female engineering student I see first hand the impact these DEI programs make in supporting / mentoring students from all backgrounds in STEM fields. We need all the STEM majors we can muster.

Alexis Clark

Self, Business Manager and Engineer

Grapevine, TX

I am a female engineer ten years out from graduating at the University of Texas at Austin who chose to complete her MBA outside of the UT system because of a lack of presence of DEI programming in business organizations. Now a senior business leader in a multinational manufacturing and technology company of construction products, I am outraged that the State of Texas is considering banning critical DEI programming that facilitates accessibility for diverse students of all kinds to fields that desperately require a broad and diverse talent pool to sustainably grow.

Without the Women in Engineering program at UT Austin, I would not have found camaraderie with other women experiencing the pressures unique to being a minority - often the only or one of few women - in my courses. I found a community, support, and empathy in challenging circumstances on top of an already rigorous academic curriculum. That group is one of many such DEI programs that fill the workforce talent pipeline with what employers actively seek: diversity of thought and a balanced next generation better representing the communities we serve that will further propel their business in an ever more rapidly evolving market.

It is unacceptable to eliminate, reduce, or restrict DEI programming at any age, but most critically at the university level as students directly prepare for the workforce. We not only hinder future generations of contributors, innovators, and leaders, but also cripple businesses desperately requiring capable, empowered, and diverse talent in increasingly competitive conditions.

Ray Whitlow

Self/ Instructor of Speech Communication at Texas Community College

Houston, TX

Dear Honorable Members of the Higher Education Committee:

I am respectfully against Senate Bill 17 because it would hinder me from effectively teaching students because of its ambiguous language. My name is Ray E. Whitlow, Jr., and I am speaking for myself as a private individual. I am also an instructor of speech communication at a Texas community college.

The language of SB 17 is ambiguous. Meaning, after reading the bill, I don't know what I can or can't do as an instructor. If the bill becomes law, because of the ambiguous language, I could break the law unintentionally. The consequences of breaking the law, even if done unintentionally, are dire. As such, I would be second guessing every action I take in the classroom, which means students would not learn. To reiterate, I am respectfully against SB 17.

Respectfully Submitted,

Ray Errol Whitlow, Jr.

Javier Ramirez, Dr.

Self / Professor

Kingwood, TX

My name is Javier Ramirez. I am an English and Humanities Division professor and PUENTE Program Coordinator at Lee College. I am here today as a private citizen, and I am testifying against SB17.

I want to speak on the damaging effect of SB17's ban on DEI. This bill would effectively eliminate helpful programs like PUENTE. PUENTE is a nationally recognized program that assists traditional and non-traditional students in achieving their college and career goals. Most of our students are low-income and first-generation who commute to campus from rural communities. Many are financially precarious—a situation made worse since the pandemic. A vital way PUENTE helps students is by minimizing financial barriers. We offer monthly gas cards, rental and utility bill assistance, scholarship opportunities, textbook lending, backpacks, and USB flash drives. We aim to minimize financial barriers so that students concentrate all their time and energy on their classes. Ultimately, our goal is for students to graduate or transfer to a 4-year institution with zero student loan debt.

In addition to minimizing financial barriers, PUENTE also mentors students. Each year we match students with professionals in their chosen careers. These mentors—some of whom work for oil and gas companies, the criminal justice sector, business and technology industries, or the medical field—give students much-needed insight into what to expect in their profession and how to succeed. Mentors also discuss working in a diverse environment and with people from diverse backgrounds. That employers praise students' adaptiveness, workforce readiness, and ability to thrive immediately speaks volumes about the benefits of PUENTE.

Our name translates to "bridge." And that's what we are for students—the "bridge" that helps them achieve their college and career goals. Our student retention and first-year completion record provide further evidence of the value of PUENTE. Let me also add that at PUENTE, we do not indoctrinate. We do not exclude. We have no hidden or nefarious political agenda. Instead, we are an inclusive program that welcomes and supports all students. We also celebrate and honor students' families. That is what we do. Our program is only made possible because of DEI initiatives.

Our students deserve to have the resources they need to succeed. Please vote against SB17, and help me and other program coordinators support our students so that they reach their full academic and career potential.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Annie Rose
Self / Engineer
The Woodlands, TX

I am writing to express my strong opposition to SB 17, which would shut down Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) offices at public universities in Texas. As a former student who has personally benefited from DEI programming, I believe that these offices are essential for creating a more inclusive and equitable educational environment.

I first participated in a DEI program at UT Austin as a HS student where I was able to learn about the field of engineering through a summer camp that would have been unavailable to me due to financial constraints. This program was my introduction to UT Austin and played a significant role in my decision to attend the university and major in Chemical Engineering.

Once on campus, I was one of the only two black female students in an engineering class size of over 150. However, I found support and resources through DEI programs like free tutoring, mentoring, and career development opportunities which helped me succeed academically and professionally.

I actively gave back by serving as a counselor for the DEI summer camp, student mentor, and through a Women in Engineering research program, I got to work with a doctoral candidate and perform lab work which furthered our understanding of sustainability and protecting water resources. These experiences not only helped me grow as a student but also helped me become a leader on campus. One of my proudest moments was being announced by the Dean as one of the Student Leaders of the year for the entire Cockrell School of Engineering.

I want to emphasize that DEI programs are not created to be exclusive or to promote a "woke agenda." Rather, they are designed to encourage, uplift, and empower underrepresented groups to succeed through intentional programming and the sharing of diverse perspectives with the community at large.

That is why one of the core tenets of DEI is inclusivity. DEI programs are not about creating spaces where only certain people are allowed; they are about designing programs with underrepresented groups in mind, while still being open and accessible to all.

At UT, our saying is "what start here changes the world." Since my time as a student at UT, I have gone on to work at various top engineering companies providing energy, food, transportation, and technology to customers and communities across the globe. This would not have been possible without my time at UT which was marked and largely empowered by DEI programs.

We have a responsibility to ensure that all students have the opportunity to succeed, regardless of their backgrounds, and DEI programs are crucial in achieving this goal. Therefore, I urge you to reconsider your support for SB 17 and to recognize the importance of promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion in higher education. Thank you.

Marion Casserberg
self / Technical Program Manager
DRIPPING SPRINGS, TX

The Texas economy has thrived due to its strong university engineering programs; many companies have moved to Texas in part because of the ability to hire engineering graduates which can drive global growth. Industry widely recognizes that employee diversity is profitable. The University of Texas has hosted Women in Engineering Program Evening with Industry since 1992 where over 40 companies have participated annually – Dell, IBM, Samsung, Intel, Shell, Dow, ExxonMobil, Texas Instruments & more! Companies in Texas depend upon, volunteer with, and fund campus DEI programs to connect with diverse talent & support their growing STEM workforce & hiring needs because it is profitable. Eliminating DEI programs in the Texas Universities will put Texas at a competitive disadvantage to retain these companies.

Marion Casserberg
self / Technical Program Manager
DRIPPING SPRINGS, TX

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Todd Moye, Dr.
self / history professor
FORT WORTH, TX

I am only representing myself with these comments, but in doing so I am drawing on my roughly 20 years' experience as a history professor at public universities in Texas. My current title is University Distinguished Teaching Professor of History at UNT. It is an honor and a genuine joy to teach on of our most diverse campuses. Should it become law, the provisions of SB 17 would make that work much more difficult. This bill is bad policy for three reasons:

First, DEI policies and programs work. As you have heard from many others, these policies and the programs that implement them show students from underrepresented backgrounds that they are valued members of our campus communities. But they do not only benefit queers students and people of color. They also benefit straight, white men like me. My own teaching practices have profited greatly from various trainings on our campus (all of which have been based on peer-reviewed research and quantitative data, not anyone's feelings) that have helped me better understand where our students are coming from, and how I can meet them there. I have encouraged countless colleagues to take advantage of these trainings, and I will continue to enroll in every course I can. I am a much better teacher than I was when I began my career at UNT, in large part because I have sought out these learning opportunities. Eliminating DEI programs would send a clear signal to our students that the state's leaders only think that some of them deserve the opportunities they can find on university campuses. Our campuses will only become more diverse over the coming decades. University administrators need access to every possible tool available to ensure that they become more inclusive as we all work toward equitable conditions.

Second, the prohibition on diversity statements in hiring processes is short-sighted and damages our efforts to hire the best possible instructors who are positioned to help us serve the students we have. When we make new hires, diversity statements only provide one data point among many others, but they help us gauge which prospective colleagues are best prepared to take up the challenge of teaching diverse student bodies.

Last, I am concerned that SB 17's provision re. executive search committees violates the principles of shared governance that are so important to the day-to-day administration of our universities. These principles have served Texas institutions of higher education well for generations. This attack on shared governance is a solution in search of a problem, and can only lead to more problems on our campuses.

For these reasons, I urge you to vote against this bill. Thank you for your consideration.

Crystal Craig
Self
San Antonio, TX

DEI makes us stronger. To say you don't believe in DEI, is to say you want everyone to look and act as one cultural/linguistic group.

Christy Dilly
Self
San Antonio, TX

Participating in programs specifically geared toward women in engineering as a college student was enormously beneficial to me and my peers. Access to resources for struggling students, academic and personal advice from peers and faculty, and a sense of community were all fostered through my experience in these programs. To eliminate them would be at a severe cost to the academic performance and wellbeing of many students.

Penny Bradshaw, N/A

Self

The Woodlands, TX

To all Committee Members:

I urge you to vote NO on SB 17 - a bill that would abolish offices of diversity, equity and inclusion at state colleges and universities, and prevent them from holding any trainings regarding issues of diversity, equity and inclusion. Inclusive and equitable institutions benefit everyone by providing inspiration and aspiration for students to achieve their goals while providing all students with greater cultural awareness and critical thinking skills. DO NOT PASS THIS BILL.

Respectfully,

Penny Bradshaw

Gavin Johnson

Self

Garland, TX

I STRONGLY OPPOSE this bill and all anti-DEI and anti-critical thinking bills designed to reduce the diversity and inclusion of our institutions higher education.

Aaron Boquet

Self

Garland, TX

I STRONGLY OPPOSE this bill because it aims to make our great universities less diverse and continue to marginalize communities who actively build and expand Texas. All students deserve to be represented and supported in Texas schools!

Marisol Cortez, Prof.
Self (university instructor)
San Antonio, TX

My name is Marisol Cortez, and I'm speaking on behalf of myself as a private citizen to oppose SB 17.

I am a Professor of Practice in the English department at the University of Texas at San Antonio. I teach undergraduates, largely in gateway courses for the English major. UTSA is a Hispanic Serving Institution, with almost 60% percent of our student body Mexican-American or Latinx, and almost 80% students of color. Not only this racial and ethnic diversity, but many kinds of diversity are reflected in my classes. My students come from every background and walk of life. I have Muslim students whose families immigrated from India, Black students who were Katrina refugees to Texas, white students from rural communities, Asian American students, Mexican American students who grew up right here on San Antonio's Westside, Nuyoricans, veterans from all backgrounds, students whose parents were farmworkers, former foster kids, single parents, disabled and neurodivergent students, migrant students, first-generation college students, queer and trans and nonbinary students, students taking my online classes because it allows them to attend while working FT as school librarians or home health care workers, students who are survivors of sexual assault, women in the military, women working as engineers or other STEM fields. The diversity in my classes reflects the diversity of Texas public institutions and of Texas itself.

Diversity does not necessarily mean equity, though, and many students who have historically struggled to gain access to Texas public institutions remain underrepresented. Coming back to university teaching after working in the community for many years, one of the things I was most impressed by was the wealth of resources UTSA makes available to such students. Every semester when preparing my syllabi, I am gratified to be able to refer my students to the multiple centers, programs, and initiatives set up to expand access to and retention within higher education. Our Office of Inclusive Excellence coordinates services and programs that improve access and retention for a wide variety of students with a variety of needs that impact recruitment, enrollment, and retention—Black and Latinx students, disabled students, LGBTQ students, but also students who are parents, veterans, first-gen or transferring in from a community college.

Many of these initiatives to which I'm lucky to be able to refer my students would be banned if SB17 passes. Beyond withdrawing material resources from vulnerable communities, how does this not send a message to many students that they are not welcome on campus—and that rather than remedy historical patterns of discrimination in higher education, the state's public university system seeks to further it?

It cannot help but send that message. I urge you to oppose SB17, for my hardworking, brilliant students and for all students who have had to struggle unjustly to access and succeed in higher ed.

Amber McClung, Mrs.
Self as a Texas resident and mother
San Antonio, TX

DEI is critically important for Texas to foster and grow. This bill dangerously takes us in the wrong direction. Please vote against this bill.

Tamara Keys
Texans4Truth
Taylor, TX

Stopping men claiming to be women for women's sports is a cheaters way to claim victory. Trans folks need their own sports events and locker rooms. It is not in the best interets of girls/women who have devoted hours of sport practice to participate only to be cheated of victory by someone "claiming" to now be a women who is physically superior in build and bone structure. Women will never win against this practice, it's shameful and degrading. Like putting a terrier on the track with a greyhound. The physics aren't there. END IT!!

Abigail Beck

Self

Dallas, TX

I am 100% against SB 17 and proposed legislation to ban DEI programs on college campuses. I received my B.S. in Civil Engineering from the University of Texas at Austin and firsthand benefited from the robust Women in Engineering Program and other affiliated DEI programming. These programs allowed me to find an encouraging community of other females. Without this community, I would not be where I am today or may have not possibly continued in engineering. As a woman in engineering, while things are getting better, we are still a minority and face challenges our male counterparts do not face. By getting rid of programs like this, the growth of STEM will be hindered. These DEI programs also sponsored my first exposure to research. Now I am pursuing a graduate degree and hope to become a professor. I have always wanted to return to Texas, the state I love and cherish, and be a professor at one of our state's institutions. However, as I see the lack of support for DEI programs to enable other women like me to pursue STEM, it makes me not want to return to Texas. I have so much hope for Texas and the continuing greatness of its institutions of higher education. Yet, if SB 17 passes it will diminish the renown our state institutions have gained. Strike down SB 17 to support future generations and to preserve our renown education institutions.

Clay Spinuzzi, Dr.

self; professor

Austin, TX

I'm a professor at UT Austin, but today I write to you as a private citizen to urge you not to support SB 17. Although I'm sure the authors want to protect free speech and free inquiry, this bill will do the opposite.

Currently the text is written so broadly that we can't tell what actions might violate it, with many details left up to the attorney general's office -- see Sec. 51.9317 2 (c) and (d). Without those details, it's impossible to understand what constitutes "conducting trainings, programs, or activities designed or implemented in reference to race, color, ethnicity, gender identity, or sexual orientation." One of our routine trainings at UT focuses on complying with federal employment law, and discusses well-known cases in which people were disadvantaged due to their race, gender, etc. Can we not talk about those past problems? How will we make sure people are treated fairly and equally if we can't discuss examples of unconscious bias?

The text also tells us to make promises that contradict each other. Sec. 51.9318 (b) charges educational institutions to incorporate these contradictory statements into their mission statements.

- (1) "We affirm that (name of institution) will educate students by means of free, open, and rigorous intellectual inquiry to seek the truth.";
- (2) "We affirm our duty to equip students with the intellectual skills they need to reach their own informed conclusions on matters of social and political importance.";
- (3) "We affirm the value of viewpoint diversity in campus intellectual life, including in faculty recruitment and hiring.";
- (4) "We affirm our duty to ensure that no aspects of (name of institution) life, in or outside the classroom, require, favor, disfavor, or prohibit speech or action that supports any political, social, or religious belief.";

People in public discourse have recently espoused racist and anti-Semitic views. Does that language fall under viewpoint diversity (3)? If so, does that mean professors can call those viewpoints racist and anti-Semitic -- can we engage in that free, open, and rigorous intellectual inquiry (1) or not? Is it okay for us to say that slavery and the Holocaust were bad, or does that violate (2)? Do we still have free speech, or is that just for students (4)?

I ask these questions because I honestly don't know the answers. Can history teachers discuss the Holocaust? Can sociology professors discuss what empirical research tells us about links between race and poverty? Can anthropology professors discuss evolution and what it tells us about race and sexuality? Can management professors study unconscious management bias related to sex, gender, and orientation?

This bill hasn't been thought through. If it's passed, it will likely result in less free speech and inquiry, less viewpoint diversity, less free inquiry -- and worse education for Texas college students.

Henry Stuckey

self, student

Austin, TX

This bill should not exit committee, in its current form it ignores several key facts about what it is meant to address. DEI does not divide campus communities; it helps to facilitate inclusive and supportive learning environments for all. “Diversity statements” are not loyalty oaths or political litmus tests. They are documents that allow a job candidate to discuss the ways that they create inclusive labs, classrooms, research teams, and learning spaces for diverse students and colleagues. The new version repeatedly uses the language of “preferential treatment.” Without DEI, preferential treatment will be given to those from majority backgrounds because efforts to recruit a diverse pool of job applicants will likely not be allowed under SB 17. Finding a diverse pool of job applicants is already a challenge given Texas politics, and we’ve already seen recruitment and retention issues this academic year due to the chilling effect proposed laws have had on recruiting prospective candidates. The carve outs in this version for federal research grants will create an unnecessary burden and bureaucracy at each institution, and if DEI is otherwise illegal at an institution, there is a high likelihood that grants will not be awarded to researchers at institutions wherein the long-term commitment to the DEI component cannot be implemented. To receive federal funding as an Hispanic Serving Institution, a designation that several Texas universities hold, the institution has to show that the institution has implemented an appropriate strategy for “servingness” in relation to Hispanic students. Under SB 17, programming that is specifically targeted toward Hispanic students would be illegal, and so Texas institutions would lose this designation and access to millions of dollars in federal grants. For all these reasons, and many others I was unfortunately not able to list here, I strongly believe this bill would need significant revisions before it should be considered by the Senate.

Julie Weng

self

AUSTIN, TX

Dear House Higher Education Committee,

I write on behalf of myself as a private citizen to opposed SB 17.

I work as a faculty member at one of Texas’s Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSI), a designation we are proud of, as we instruct not just Latina/o populations but numerous other underrepresented populations in higher education. My colleagues and I are passionately preparing our often first-generation college students for joining the competitive workforce in Texas.

I am deeply concerned about the negative affects of this Bill on our student population and our designation as an HSI.

To receive federal funding as an HSI, my institution has to show that it has implemented an appropriate strategy for “servingness” in relation to Hispanic students. Under SB 17, programming that is specifically targeted toward Hispanic students would be illegal, and so Texas institutions like mine would lose this designation and access to millions of dollars in federal grants. In other words, this bill will disproportionately affect our university and students.

At our university DEI does not divide our campus community but rather helps to facilitate an inclusive and supportive learning environment for all. No student receives preferential treatment, as the language of the Bill suggests. Our DEI office instead seeks pathways to support broad swaths of students in need.

Our DEI office also circulates flyers of some of the courses I teach, which are often of interest to students it serves. I appreciate this way of expanding the reach of my teaching outside of my department.

Please vote no on SB 17.

Sincerely,

Julie Weng

Ana Dison
self
Austin, TX

I oppose SB 17. For nearly the past 20 years of my professional career, I have worked tirelessly to improve access and experience of college students into STEM degrees and careers. I have advised, worked with, counseled, hired, supervised, mentored, taught, and worked with thousands of amazing college students in STEM during this time and in programs that promote diversity, equity and inclusion. I have personally witnessed the impact of this work on both young men and women. I have also worked tirelessly to support programs that encourage K-12 grade students from underserved backgrounds, to consider a major and a career in a STEM field. Speaking to you today as a private citizen, I strongly urge you to oppose SB 17 for the damage it will do to so many programs and initiatives across the entire educational landscape that will turn back the clock on what we've been able to do as a state to help historically excluded people enter STEM fields. DEI programs are about community, creating a sense of belonging, and providing mentoring, peer support and role models that are the backbone to student success. These programs are not exclusive or limited. They are open to all and serve all students regardless of identity. The business community understands, invests and supports the case for developing a diverse workforce and actively seek to recruit diverse STEM talent to help solve some of our biggest problems in society. We know from the research that the more diverse a team is, the better the solutions are. Diversity is not just about race. Diversity incorporates people from all types of backgrounds, with all types of educational and life experiences. Don't let SB 17 rob our great state of the diversity that makes us better as a people. Don't let SB 17 disband or prohibit us from developing the diverse talent we need to help solve some big problems that we are facing as a society. Don't let SB 17 turn the clock back on the progress we've made. Let's focus on progress and making Texas the best it can be by embracing the richness of the diversity in our communities. I oppose SB 17 and you should too.

Barbara Bullock
self - teacher
Austin, TX

I am a private citizen, representing my personal viewpoint. I oppose SB17. When I was an elementary school student, my 5th and 6th grade math and science teachers were men, returning veterans who had been guaranteed a teaching job if they had a university degree. Most of them would never call on a girl in class. We got the message that girls did not belong in math or science. Today, I am a tenured Professor at the University of Texas at Austin, where I have had the privilege of working with and teaching the most talented and diverse group of students that I have encountered in my 30+ years as a professor. I do not want any student to feel that they do not belong in my class or in my field. DEI initiatives are not about excluding or dividing, nor are they about giving preferential treatment to certain groups. They are about creating a teaching and learning environment across the university where everyone belongs and everyone can make a significant contribution to our ways of understanding the world in any field.

Stacey Sowards, Dr.

self, professor

Austin, TX

First, I'm writing on behalf of myself as a private individual, to oppose SB 17. I am also a professor at The University of Texas at Austin in the field of communication studies.

Diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility matters have been immensely important to my work, to my field, and to my university. One of the best benefits of promoting such efforts of belonging is that when faculty and staff represent the student body of a university, the students come to feel a greater sense of belonging, especially when they see people like them as their professors, administrators, advisors, and mentors. UT Austin is a Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI), a designation that allows a faculty member like me to apply for grant money to support educational initiatives to help all Texans pursue higher education, such as Title V funding from the US Department of Education. But in order to maintain this status as an HSI, we need to have diverse viewpoints of all kinds, along with diverse peoples who can reach our student body, ranging from all political perspectives to various cultural groups. Latinx students do better in their classes and are more likely to graduate when they have mentors and advisors who understand their backgrounds. And, UT Austin doesn't just serve Latinx students, but the student body reflects the wide ranging diversity of Texans, ranging from West Texas to rural Texas to urban Texas, and all the people in between.

Students who can effectively interact with diverse viewpoints, cultures, languages, and perspectives will also be more effective in the workforce and in our communities. To gain such diversity understanding, they need to be able to engage in their college classrooms on all kinds of ideas, to listen to each other and understand different histories, backgrounds, and cultural knowledges. Intercultural communication, one of my areas of specialty, focuses on how communication practices vary across and within cultures. Understanding diversity of communication styles also helps students to interact with the world and their future workplaces more knowledgeably and effectively. Being equipped with such skills makes all of our communities better, from engaging politically, understanding nuance, developing critical thinking skills, and listening empathetically. I strongly opposed SB 17.

Andrew Martin, Professor

Self, Professor

Lubbock, TX

I oppose SB17 because it diminishes shared governance at our institutions of higher education and makes it more difficult to create a welcoming environment for all students, staff, and faculty on public university campuses. In my experience as a full professor at an R1 institution here in Texas, the active participation of faculty, students, and staff on presidential search committees and in hiring decisions for other administrators is essential for the best candidates to be identified and hired. Decisions about core curricula and tenure-track faculty positions are even more unique to the role of the faculty: the American Association of University Professors asserts that “[t]he faculty has primary responsibility for such fundamental areas as curriculum, subject matter and methods of instruction, research, faculty status, and those aspects of student life which relate to the educational process.” Curricular and faculty hiring authority should be in the hands of those who work together to develop and teach the curriculum based on appropriate training, research, and expertise in their fields. My experience of "diversity, equity, and inclusion" is not related to any specific ideology or a tool to exclude anyone: these terms refer to principles that I think we all hold in common as human beings and citizens of this country: that we should welcome the differences we have with each other as part of the complexities and richness of human society, creativity, and intellectual thought, that basic fairness should take into account inequalities in resources and opportunities, and that everyone should feel like our university campus and all its resources is there for them. Trainings on diversity, equity, inclusion, bias, oppression, gender identity, and related concepts are not always successful, but we should continue to make the effort to learn about all of these facets of our social, cultural, and academic environments. All of us should be proud of the quality of higher education in Texas, built over more than a century and a half into prominent national and global standing through the efforts of faculty, staff, administrators, and students, and the support of our citizens. Please ensure that teachers, researchers, and students in higher education remain free to teach, learn, and conduct research without interference. I speak for myself as a private citizen, and am not representing a group or organization. Thank you for the opportunity comment on proposed legislation affecting education in our state.

Crystal Robert

self, higher education instructor

El Paso, TX

I am reaching out regarding the upcoming Texas Legislature and its effect on El Paso Community College and public higher education institutions in Texas. I am an El Paso, Texas resident, homeowner, higher education instructor, LGBTQ advocate, and avid voter and I would like to be heard regarding SB 17.

As you know, Senate Bill 17 (Banning Discriminatory Diversity, Equity and Inclusion DEI Policies in Higher Education) will affect a great many offices, organizations, programs, faculty, staff, and students at the higher education institutions in my community, El Paso Community College and the University of Texas at El Paso. SB 17 would also endanger tenure and free speech in our classrooms and would hurt our communities.

Diversity Offices do more than plan celebratory events for various demographic groups, there are times when the Diversity event offered on campus may be the only meal a student may eat in the day. Diversity offices create events that offer special insight into a culture similar to their own, foster a sense of belonging and contribute to a vibrant campus life. The higher education institutions in my community are Hispanic Serving Institutions. To receive federal funding as a Hispanic Serving Institution, a designation that several Texas universities hold, the institution has to show that the institution has implemented an appropriate strategy for “servingness” in relation to Hispanic students. Under SB 17, programming that is specifically targeted toward Hispanic students would be illegal, and so Texas institutions would lose this designation and access to millions of dollars in federal grants.

I am a volunteer founder and trainer of the EPCC Diversity Programs LGBTQ Safe Zone, a voluntary training program for the EPCC community, and have been the faculty advisor for the student club, Queer Straight Alliance for nearly eight years. I am deeply concerned about what the lack of a Diversity office would mean to our campus and our students. The Diversity events at our campus have been paramount to the success of our students.

As a mother, I am discussing out-of-state options or private colleges and universities with my three sons as I do not believe that Texas institutions will have the same caliber of education if these dangerous bills pass.

I am a volunteer deputy registrar and higher education speech communication instructor and have been for over a decade. I teach the students in my classrooms and the area high school students I register to vote on the importance of critical thinking and a truth-seeking ethos. Through civic engagement and advocacy events, I help coordinate through the Pasos Program (a program that believes our location, populations, and stories are assets to learning) I help students learn about and celebrate their differences. I am deeply concerned about the future of education in the state of Texas if these bills pass.

There is danger in the single story. -Chimamanda Ngozi Adiche

Hilary Toma

Self

The Woodlands, TX

I urge the members of the committee to vote NO on SB 17, because inclusive and equitable institutions benefit everyone.

Susan Anderson, Dr.
Texas UU Justice Ministry
Benbrook, TX

I am a professor at a private university in Texas and a parent of a student attending UT-Austin. One of the primary reasons that I supported my daughter's choice to attend UT-Austin was the diversity of the campus and the university's support for diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI). I would like to make the following three points: (1) DEI is not divisive. Rather it helps universities create an environment where everyone feels a sense of belonging and students learn to interact with each other across differences (a skill that is important in the workplace and betters our communities). (2) DEI helps to create rich and engaging learning environments that benefit all students. Diversity statements are an important tool that helps the university identify individuals who bring unique perspectives to the university, thus enriching the community rather than reinforcing the status quo. These statements are not loyalty oaths or political litmus tests. DEI reduces preferential treatment by helping universities recruit a diverse pool of job applicants - so that the most qualified individuals can be hired regardless of their backgrounds. Some Texas universities have already experienced recruitment and retention issues this academic year due to the chilling effect of proposed laws such as SB 17. (3) DEI facilitates external funding. The carve-outs in the current version of SB 17 for federal research grants will create an unnecessary burden and bureaucracy at each institution, and if DEI is otherwise illegal at an institution, there is a high likelihood that grants will not be awarded. Further, to receive federal funding as a Hispanic Serving Institution, a designation that several Texas universities hold, the institution has to show that they have implemented an appropriate strategy for "servingness" in relation to Hispanic students. Under SB 17, programming that is specifically targeted toward Hispanic students would be illegal, and so Texas institutions would lose this designation and access to millions of dollars in federal grants.

Shiree Allison
Self
Stephenville, TX

<https://www.tarleton.edu/news/tarleton-helping-preserve-stephenvilles-historic-mount-olive-cemetery/>

The link I provided above is an example of what the Division of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion does at Tarleton State University-Stephenville. The mayor and the city council endeavor to restore Mount Olive Cemetery- a historically Black cemetery. As Mayor Doug Svien put it at a church Bible study, "We cannot go back and change the past. But, we can learn from our mistakes and move forward."

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion departments at universities are not designed to coordinate efforts to establish Affirmative Action. These departments seek to reach out to those who feel that they do not belong and may be at risk of leaving academia if they are not supported. The populations served by Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion include disabled students and students who are low-income, or are the first member in their family to attend college. It is extremely stressful for students to begin their academic career away from their family and/or support system. I use these same services as a non-traditional student. As an older student, I find a sense of belonging when I engage with older students who share a similar background. I can relate to these students, share resources with them, and build a supportive network of friends. Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Departments are not intended nor engaged in blaming students for tragedies that happened in the past. The Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Offices seek to embrace the beauty of diversity that occurs not only at universities, but around the state, the country, and the world. These efforts foster support and encourage progress through partnership. When we embrace diversity and learn from each other, we become better people. Every one of us have rich experiences and origins. It is natural that if we find someone that can embrace our shared value system, it is much easier to succeed. I urge you to vote "No" on Senate Bill 17. Thank you, Shiree Allison

Shawntal Brown
Self & Texas DEI Practitioner
AUSTIN, TX

My name is Shawntal Brown writing from Austin, TX, 78756, I am writing to you as a private citizen but I am also a staff member at a Texas institution with 6 years of experience working in diversity, equity, and inclusion offices. I am extremely concerned about bills SB 17 as these bills will negatively impact the infrastructure of Texas institutions. The passage of these bills will put higher education in the state of Texas in an impoverished condition.

Furthermore, the passage of SB 17 will drastically affect the recruitment and admissions of underrepresented students at Texas institutions. Underrepresented students, staff, and faculty are not only ethnic minorities but they are also individuals from rural backgrounds, former foster youth, first-generation, low socioeconomic status, disabled individuals, veterans, and even more. Removing these offices will remove a campus resource from these populations, which would negatively impact their navigation on their campuses. There are researchers who express that Offices of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion promote a sense of belonging for these campus members and the work that DEI professionals do on their campuses has been grossly misrepresented. Ultimately, the passage of SB 17 would be detrimental to Texas institutions.

In my professional experience, I have worked with research organizations, such as LSAMP (Louis Stokes Alliance for Minority Participation) Program, which provides funding for underrepresented students interested in research and attending graduate school. This program is a subgrant from the National Science Foundation, which strongly supports STEM students from underrepresented backgrounds. Based on the program guidelines for a university, it can provide an estimated 10 million dollars for universities to support housing, research stipends, and other professional development funds for underrepresented students.

The LSAMP program requires a coordinator, especially one in a diversity, equity, and inclusion office, to support the professional development of the students, organize the curriculum for the participants, as well as coordinate other program logistics. This opportunity offers students at least \$5,000 to connect the pipeline from undergraduate to graduate education. Without diversity, equity, and inclusion offices, unique funding opportunities would not be offered to institutions because there would be no staff members to lead these offices. These staff positions and offices are dedicated to these roles to assist in this progress to support these student populations. I implore you to vote against these bills because they will drastically affect the reputation of Texas institutions.

Sincerely,
Shawntal Brown

Laya Kumar
self/student
eules, TX

DEI programs have an unimaginable impact on minority populations which I can attest to based on my personal experience with them as a student of the University of Texas at Austin. One prominent program, Women in STEM, gave me access to networking dinners, company office tours, and conference visits that all contributed to my ability to secure an internship which I would be otherwise unable to do because of my lack of family connections which is an issue many minorities face. DEI initiatives create opportunities for underrepresented groups to enter the STEM workforce, which allowed me as an Asian woman to feel empowered and gave me a sense of belonging as well. Implementing SB 17 would take away these opportunities from generations of students who would go on to be successful and give back to the state of Texas, like I hope to, so I am requesting that you consider our experiences with empathy and compassion.

Dinah Hannaford
University of Houston
Austin, TX

This bill strips away the right for Texas universities to determine what qualities are important for hiring. Texas universities know what their communities need and they, not the state, are the ones who should be determining their own standards and tools for hiring. SB 17 is government overreach and will drive away qualified job candidates, top scholars, and excellent students who want universities that reflect their values.

Megan Raby, Dr.

self, professor

Austin, TX

My name is Megan Raby. I am speaking for myself as a private citizen and Texas resident. I'm testifying against SB17.

I am an associate professor of history at UT-Austin, where I have taught for nine years. I have many serious concerns about SB17, but I will focus on how it fundamentally misrepresents the nature of programs for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion. Both versions of the law refers to "preferential treatment." In fact, without DEI policies Diversity, people from majority backgrounds will be the ones likely to receive preferential treatment, because proactive efforts to recruit a diverse group of job candidates may not be allowed under Senate Bill 17. Attracting a diverse pool of candidates is already difficult—in large part because of Texas's growing reputation for political interference in higher education such as this bill represents. I urge you to vote no on SB17 to prevent further damage to the quality and reputation of our public universities.

Christopher Avila

self

Seagoville, TX

I am writing to express my strong opposition to SB 17. As a concerned citizen, an alumni of the University of Texas at Arlington and an LCSW-S in Texas, I believe these bills will negatively impact the quality of education for social workers and the overall academic freedom in our state.

This bill will endanger the ability of Texas colleges and universities to facilitate meaningful learning environments that equip social work students with the academic, social, and emotional skills needed to navigate the social work profession after higher education. This bill will silence the unique perspectives brought to classrooms by the wide array of perspectives that live within the state of Texas and erase any acknowledgment of social realities that affect all those who benefit from social work services. Suppressing our diversities and multicultural perspectives through extreme oversight of policies and hiring will severely disadvantage the educational institutions of Texas.

Since Texas universities are world-renowned for their innovations in all disciplines, the oversight and expulsion of DEI will harm everyone in the state across multiple occupational fields, especially those in the mental health and social service professions, and jeopardize the cutting-edge research that makes our state's education so prestigious.

I urge you to vote against this bill and to support policies that protect academic freedom and truth in higher education. Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

Kerry Sinanan, Dr
Representing Self: Professor
San Antonio, TX

My name is Kerry Sinanan and I am an Assistant Professor in the Department of English at the University of Texas, at San Antonio. I write here as a private person and not to oppose SB 17 in my public role. I was hired by UTSA because of my lived experience as a member of the Caribbean diaspora, because of my expertise in the literatures and cultures of the 18th and 19th centuries, and because I focus on the histories of transatlantic slavery and race in this period. My students at UTSA, which is a Hispanic Serving Institution, repeatedly tell me how important it is to them to learn about these contexts as they are also part of their histories and lives. This is true for all students, be they white, Latinx, Black or Indigenous. This is what active and positive DEIJ practices ensure: hiring professors who can offer students aspects of disciplines and subjects that are relevant to their own lives and histories, and ensuring that all of our students are given full accounts of areas and subjects. Never in five years have any students expressed that learning about the transatlantic slave trade, or about Black and Indigenous writers from the 18th century is divisive: on the contrary, repeatedly students say in official student evaluations, that they feel how important it is for them to know these aspects of literary culture. Including these authors does not mean that we do not read traditional canonical materials as well: it does mean that we broaden the horizons, knowledge bases and skills of students. Such a breadth of curriculum is what has made the UT System, more broadly, world-class and able to attain Carnegie R1 status for many of its universities. This prestige, founded on diversity is what attracted me as an international candidate, to apply for my current post. DEIJ practices ensure the enhancement of subjects by bringing in knowledge and by offering wider views of traditional subjects which then keeps them alive for students. In turn, these students become more knowledgeable, more competitive, and more skilled for the wide range of careers that lie ahead for humanities graduates. UTSA humanities graduates continue to work in multiple careers across the private and public sector, often moving into education themselves, but also working in Public Relations, Marketing and the creative industries that Texas is so famous for, to name a few. Texas currently enjoys a booming economy and the UT system, highly regarded on a global level, is an enormous part of that. DEIJ practices, policies and cultures are fundamental to this network of success that begins in the classrooms of UTSA, with diverse professors, inclusive and rich curricula full of multiple perspectives, and that then ripples out to the wider communities and sectors in Texas. Cutting or curtailing DEIJ sends out the wrong message both to our young people and to corporations, investors, and community organizations: it send out a message of fear and insularity that is contrary to the gl

Raghunandan Ramanan
Self
Georgetown, TX

I oppose SB 17.

Eric Weissgarber
Self
San Antonio, TX

Myself, my wife, my two brothers, two of my children, and two of my nephews, all attended the university of Texas at Austin with undergraduate and many graduate degrees. The nonsense of State spending precious state resources to create active political indoctrination offices of DEI is completely against freedom of speech Thrifty administration of public dollars and is empowering a regime and trying to thought completely against for a freedom of thought and democracy. Please stand up and do what we all know is proper and right and get rid of this very intrusive, very poisonous environment created by these 1984 Orwellian type tactics.

With all respect

Hook 'em horns.

Eric Weissgarber, BBA, 1975 University of Texas at Austin .

Shany Puthiya Kunnon

Self

Georgetown, TX

I oppose SB 17.

May Tun

Self

Manor, TX

I am writing to express my strong opposition to SB 17, and SB 18. As a concerned citizen and a student of the University of Texas at San Antonio, I believe these bills would negatively impact the quality of education and academic freedom in our state.

These bills endanger the ability of Texas colleges and universities to facilitate meaningful learning environments that equip students with the academic, social, and emotional skills they need to navigate the world beyond higher education. They would silence the unique perspectives that each of us brings to the classroom and erases any acknowledgment of social realities that affect all students both in and outside of the learning environment. Suppressing our diversities through extreme oversight of policies and hiring would severely disadvantage the educational institutions of Texas.

Texas universities are world-renowned for their innovations in all disciplines; the oversight and expulsion of DEI would harm everyone in the state across occupational fields and jeopardize the cutting-edge research that makes our state's education so prestigious.

I urge you to vote against these bills and to support policies that protect academic freedom and truth in higher education. Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,

May Tun

Laura McCown

self - Engineer

Humble, TX

My name is Laura McCown and I am a private individual and these are my personal opinions. I oppose SB 17. I am an engineer working for TechnipFMC in Houston, TX, and attended UT Austin from 2005-2009. With the encouragement of my father, I planned to study engineering and only applied to UT Austin and Texas A&M. I toured both schools. It was when I visited the Women in Engineering Program (WEP) office at UT and got to know the director and her staff, I knew UT Austin was where I wanted to be. I was highly involved in the organization throughout my time at UT. This DEI org provided me with a community of peers and mentors in a very large engineering program. I was primarily on the receiving end of mentoring in my freshman and sophomore years. About midway through my engineering program, I considered switching to a different (non-STEM) discipline because I wasn't sure engineering was for me. It was the WEP community and seminars that encouraged me to continue in my engineering program. In my junior and senior years, I transitioned to more of a volunteer and mentorship role for the younger students. I am forever thankful for that organization and remain on their email distribution to this day. When I donate money to the university, I direct it toward the women in engineering and women in STEM programs, because I know how much value they provide to the young women interested in the STEM fields. I have participated in recruiting at TechnipFMC and we intentionally recruit women to meet our ESG goals. It is programs like these that ensure that there are qualified women in STEM available to recruit into Texas companies.

Mariela Nunez-Janes, Dr.

Self, Professor

Denton, TX

My name is Mariela Nuñez-Janes and I am a Professor from Denton where I have lived and taught for 20 years. I am writing to share my opposition to S.B. 17 proposed in the Texas state legislature that may prohibit institutions from fostering inclusive environments for all students.

It is important to me that Texas Public Colleges and Universities provide an inclusive education that welcomes all students because DEI helps to facilitate inclusive and supportive learning environments for all, it does not divide students and campus communities. The new version repeatedly uses the language of “preferential treatment.” Without DEI, preferential treatment will be given instead to those from majority backgrounds because efforts to recruit a diverse pool of job applicants will likely not be allowed under SB 17. Finding a diverse pool of job applicants is already a challenge given Texas politics, and we’ve already seen recruitment and retention issues this academic year due to the chilling effect proposed laws have had on recruiting prospective candidates. My department was conducting a faculty search this academic year and after many months of interviews the job candidate that was selected declined the job offer because of the uncertainties of SB 17. In addition, many of our universities in TX are now Hispanic Serving Institutions. My institution is one of them. To receive federal funding as an Hispanic Serving Institution, the institution has to show that it has implemented an appropriate strategy for “servingness” in relation to Hispanic students. Under SB 17, programming that is specifically targeted toward Hispanic students would be illegal, and so Texas institutions would lose this designation and access to millions of dollars in federal grants. This will also damage the Research 1 status of my university including. Further, this funding can also be life saving for students. During the lockdown resulting from the COVID pandemic my institution was able to tap into Hispanic Serving Institution funding to be able to supplement emergency funds provided by the federal government to students and in this way give access to much needed economic support to all students who were hurting financially.

Marisa Knox, Dr.

Self, Professor

Edinburg, TX

This bill fundamentally misunderstands DEI, which are statements of inclusion, not quotas or litmus tests, and are intended not to give preferential treatment, but help to recruit more underrepresented populations in higher education. Furthermore, as a professor of a Hispanic-serving institution, even though I speak only for myself and not that institution, I am also concerned that our universities will be denied crucial federal funding and other grants for research if DEI policies cannot be implemented as required.

Sharon Tryon, Mrs

Self

Waxahachie, TX

I support this bill. Please vote Yes

Travis Weiland

Self University faculty

Houston, TX

As a faculty member I have found DEI initiatives to be crucial to creating a faculty with a diversity of perspectives necessary to prepare students to be critical thinkers in our democratic society. Such initiatives preserve freethinking and foster new ideas and innovations. This bill will furthermore negatively impact the ability of faculty to pursue federal grants that bring millions of dollars to our state and help create jobs and support students. I adamantly oppose this bill that has the potential to relegate our state institutions to the bottom of the rankings and leave to a mass exodus of faculty

Sylvia Coulson

Self

Waxahachie, TX

I support this bill

Audrey Taylor
Self/Professor
EAGLE PASS, TX

Removing the ability for teachers to enhance the learning and opportunities for all their students is an egregious overstep of big government.

Kelly Bezio, Dr.
self
CORPUS CHRISTI, TX

My name is Kelly Bezio, and I am commenting as a private citizen. I am writing to oppose SB17. I have been teaching in higher education for twenty years, and ten of those years have been in Texas. What has always stood out to me about our students in Texas is their desire to learn, which SB17 will inhibit. I meet many first-year and second-year students in the literature courses I teach in the core curriculum. Because I teach at a regional state university, which enrolls many students from rural and underserved regions, these students are often the first to attend college in their families. They are precisely the population that the 60x30TX initiative seeks to educate and who will contribute to a productive and innovative workforce in the decades to come. Despite this bipartisan strategic plan for Texas education, my students still tell me stories about how they were discouraged from attending college by guidance counselors, employers, and family members. And yet, these students still applied to college and still see higher ed as a part of their plans for success. But they also still face barriers to doing well in college. DEI programs and initiatives have proven essential for helping my students complete their degrees—regardless of whether they see themselves as represented by the words “diversity,” “equity,” or “inclusion.” On my campus, these programs help students understand how to use the library, how to navigate financial aid applications, how to apply for part-time work, how to develop good study skills, and how to collaborate with others. Our DEI efforts are a credit to higher education in Texas and are a model to other states. They deserve support from our elected officials and should not be under attack.

Alejandra Elenes
self
San Antonio, TX

I have concerns regarding SB 17 and the elimination of DEI. To my understanding the purpose of DEI is to creating an inclusive and supportive learning environments for all, as such there are not divisive. Universities use multiple data points to assess the qualification of a candidate. One of these are “Diversity statements,” which are not loyalty oaths or political litmus tests. They are documents that allow a job candidate to discuss the ways that they create inclusive labs, classrooms, research teams, and learning spaces for diverse students and colleagues. These is no preferential treatment, but a way to understand a candidate broad perspective. Eliminating DEI will add to bureaucratic levels, especially in reference to federal research grants will create an unnecessary burden and bureaucracy at each institution. If DEI is illegal at an institution, there is a high likelihood that grants will not be awarded to researchers at institutions wherein the long-term commitment to the DEI component cannot be implemented. To receive federal funding as an Hispanic Serving Institution, a designation that several Texas universities hold, the institution has to show that it has implemented an appropriate strategy for “servingness” in relation to Hispanic students. Under SB 17, programming that is specifically targeted toward Hispanic students would be illegal, and so Texas institutions would lose this designation and access to millions of dollars in federal grants.

Kathy Ponce
Self
MAYPEARL, TX

I support this bill. Pass it out of Committee and get the Committee report to Calendars ASAP so it can go to a Floor Vote.

Guan Soon Khoo

self

Cedar Park, TX

I am an Associate Professor of Instruction at UT Austin. I am an 'Inclusion and Equity Officer' in the School of Advertising and PR. I am speaking for myself as a private U.S. citizen. Specifically, I am testifying AGAINST SB 17.

My name is Guan Soon Khoo. It's not a common name in Texas. My students address me as Dr. Khoo. "Khoo" like "Coo Coo Cachoo, Mrs. Robinson!" from the film "The Graduate." In my 30 years as an Asian American with an uncommon name, I have found ways to relate and belong to this place that I now call home.

For my students, especially people of color like myself, 'a sense of belonging,' which affects college retention rates, can be difficult to establish. And it's not just people of color who do not feel included. This Spring, a White student in my class who learned about poverty as a social issue was glad to study from a perspective that resonated with their low-income family background. DEI initiatives at our School are programs and activities that strive to bring in marginalized perspectives that promote a sense of inclusiveness and, more generally, provide learning opportunities for students from majority backgrounds who are seldom exposed to marginalized viewpoints.

My key role as an 'Inclusion and Equity Officer,' is to listen. Oftentimes, it's that simple. Students who are interested in DEI programming and activities meet with me and some of the DEI leadership around once a month. We listen to the students' college experiences surrounding issues related to DEI to ensure that our teaching and school programming are inclusive, not divisive.

In the study and practice of Advertising and PR, 'Creativity' is a valued concept. Creativity occurs when a talented person who has been previously exposed to aspects of culture (e.g., elements of popular culture) fuses these cultural elements with their own unique background to create a novel idea that is more likely to be passed onto the next generation.

For example, Walt Disney and his lead artist did not create Mickey Mouse from scratch; the iconic cartoon character was inspired by cultural elements of its time, specifically Buster Keaton's silent comedy "Steamboat Bill, Jr." and the first sound film "The Jazz Singer," two works of entertainment that Walt Disney knew and drew from. Another example is the Marvel hit movie "The Black Panther," the highest grossing film of 2018, where African American director Ryan Coogler created a successful franchise by drawing from the works of Stan Lee and Jack Kirby, as well as elements of the lesser-known literary genre of Afrofuturism.

There is an indirect, but genuine link between exposure to various cultures and diverse perspectives and the greater likelihood of creativity. DEI programs and activities can help our students become more creative and successful by validating the importance of their cultural backgrounds and promoting a richer cultural proficiency and knowledge.

Please vote against SB 17. Thank you.

Skylar Rolf, Dr.

Self, Assistant Professor of Management (tenure-track) at a public university in Texas

Missouri City, TX

Dear Members of the Higher Education Committee,

I am representing myself as a private individual...As a 3rd year tenure-track Assistant Professor of Management at the University of Houston - Clear Lake, I urge you to vote against this revised version of SB 17. I believe this bill will harm the ability of our higher education institutions in serving a diverse student population. DEI offices and programs provide essential services to students who are in need of them, and removing these resources without an alternative means to fill the gap would be a disservice to our students. Furthermore, I believe that eliminating DEI offices and programs without a meaningful replacement will send a signal to many Texas high school students that their needs are not prioritized, and many of these students will look to universities in other states to pursue higher education degrees. Please vote AGAINST SB 17.

Respectfully,

Skylar Rolf, PhD

Christen Smith, Dr.

self, professor

Austin, TX

Christen Smith

My name is Dr. Christen Smith, and I speak for myself as a private individual. I oppose SB 17. I am also a professor of African and African Diaspora Studies, Anthropology, Women's and Gender Studies and Latin American Studies at the University of Texas at Austin where I direct the Center for Women's and Gender Studies. As a professor who teaching courses in Black studies, Latin American studies and gender and sexuality studies, I have personally seen the benefits of diversity, equity and inclusion. Texas students travel from all over our great state to gather in diverse spaces of learning for their betterment and the betterment of our broader society. Many students in women's and gender studies only come to feel truly safe and able to live freely as themselves once they arrived on our campus, where the principles of diversity, equity and inclusion have made them feel that they belong, and encourage all students, faculty and staff to respect one another regardless of our differences. Indeed, many young women and gender non-binary students who come to my classroom feel empowered by an inclusive classroom that teaches them that they can do anything, regardless of their gender and sexuality. This feeling is the result of teaching and diversity, equity and inclusion efforts on campuses that deliberately generate inclusive environments by making sure that we have inclusive policies that allow all students equal access to resources and opportunities. A ban on DEI would inhibit our ability to foster safe learning environments in Texas universities. DEI offices and professionals provide the teaching tools and training necessary to foster learning spaces where all students are respected and educated regardless of race, sex, or ethnicity or social, political or religious background and belief. Diversity, equity and inclusion gives us the tools to work together across our differences rather than become more divided and siloed. A ban on DEI would also put students at a disadvantage as they enter the workforce. Businesses increasingly recruit young people who are savvy about diversity and inclusion to their businesses. Indeed, many businesses hire diversity, equity and inclusion trainers to coach their employees on creating diverse and inclusive workplaces, and these same companies also seek job candidates with established DEI knowledge and training. The work that happens in universities around diversity, equity and inclusion is not just a matter of diversifying university campuses but also a question of training young people in Texas to enter the workforce. Thank you sincerely for your time and attention.

Cindy Fountain, Ms

Self, Retail Merchandising

Cleburne, TX

I oppose this bill. DEI does not divide campus communities; it helps to facilitate inclusive and supportive learning environments for all. It is very concerning to me that this bill is actually taking us backward in time to where voices of color were intentionally silenced. I am white and find it appalling that Texans would be willing to turn our state into a hateful place for our college students and faculty. Texas will lose money if this bill becomes law because too many will turn away from Texas to pursue or work in higher education. Thank you.

Greg Moses

Self Lecturer

Austin, TX

My name is Greg Moses, and I'm speaking for myself as a long-time Texas voter. I am testifying against SB 17, the anti-DEI bill. I have been a student or teacher in Texas higher education for nearly 40 years, and I continue to teach here at a public university. Over the decades, Texas higher education has evolved DEI programs in support of student success and Civil Rights. The progress of these programs has been steady and impressive. Friends of student success and Civil Rights rely upon these programs and the professionals who administer them. If you suppress these programs with SB 17, many thousands of Texas students will find themselves abandoned abruptly, putting their success and their Civil Rights at risk. If you vote for SB 17, you will send a loud and crashing message across the world that Texas is hostile to Civil Rights on its college campuses. You must vote against SB 17 and put a stop to this attack against the spirit and letter of Civil Rights law on Texas campuses. Allow our exemplary DEI professionals to continue their excellent support of our talented future leaders. Vote against SB 17.

Aaishah Ale-rasool

self, student and tutor at UT Dallas

Plano, TX

DEI offices are important for students to thrive. As a queer student, the time I have spent in the Galerstein Gender Center has helped me feel safe and make new friends on campus. I have used this center to nap, eat, meet up with friends, and relax in a safe space. It has become an integral part of my success and mental health at UTD. The center also provides menstrual products for those who need them, which are great in an emergency. It is also a good place to get educated about different topics and supports queer students who need it. Under the new bills being implemented, the Galerstein Gender Center will have to shut down. Other diversity centers and safe spaces for students of different cultures and religions, such as the Multicultural Center, will also have to shut down. This bill is preventing students from expressing their culture and identity with other students who may have those things in common and is shutting down programs that protect students from bigotry or harassment based on their background. I want to address those who may feel that DEI programs support things that are against their religion. I am a religious Muslim myself, and I want you to ask yourself if your religion would support removing programs that improve the mental health of students and allow them to thrive. These programs are not harmful in any way, and no one is being forced to partake in them if they do not want to, but shutting them down could shut down a support system for a student who may not have anywhere else to go.

Nancy Bennett

self

Granbury, TX

Please do not allow this bill to pass. The idea that DEI is somehow "exclusive" is ridiculous. Proper DEI training is important for our public institutions.

James Klein

Texas Association of College Teachers

Corpus Christi, TX

I am administering final exams to my students today and so am unable to attend in person the Texas House Higher Education Committee. I thank the Committee in advance for considering these written remarks.

The Texas Association of College Teachers (TACT) remains opposed to SB 17. We see Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) programs, initiatives, and committees as vital to the creation and maintenance of a welcoming atmosphere at Texas colleges and universities for all students, faculty and staff. DEI efforts will be necessary for higher education institutions to achieve the laudable 60X30 goal (sixty percent of the public earning a post secondary degree or certificate by the year 2030) as the state population becomes increasingly diverse in the twenty-first century.

We are encouraged that language has been included in this bill that would exempt research grant applications and accreditation standards from its provisions, but remain concerned that the bill's current language will have a chilling effect, discouraging accomplished faculty and promising students from attending higher education institutions in the state to the detriment of the people and economy of the great state of Texas.

Respectfully,

James (Jim) Klein, Ph.D.

Professor of History

President, TACT

Ira Dworkin, Dr.
self/university professor
Bryan, TX

My name is Ira Dworkin, I live in Bryan, TX (House District 14, represented by Rep. Raney), and I am writing to express my opposition to SB17. (I am a tenured faculty member at Texas A&M, and I am writing as a private citizen and speaking on my own behalf.)

The proposed legislation will deeply damage the work that many Texans have done over the course of several generations to make institutions in the state better serve the most people possible. The prohibition against asking about diversity effectively makes it impossible for a university to hire qualified teachers or researchers who have worked with any group that is considered marginalized—whether military veterans, first-generation students, or African Americans. Contrary to perception, such programs ensure that hiring committees cultivate the widest applicant pool possible, which creates a highly competitive hiring process whose goal is always to hire the best candidates. The suggestion in the law that these restrictions will not apply to instruction or research is wholly unrealistic. The passage of even a revised version of this bill will make it difficult for faculty to feel confident that their academic freedom will be protected.

In addition, DEI initiatives provide the training infrastructure that enable faculty to comply with state and federal anti-discrimination law, so SB17 is unnecessary. There are already laws in place which prohibit discrimination, so this law seems to serve little purpose other than stoking unfounded fear about “DEL.” The goal of institutions of higher education is to educate a student population that is representative of the demographics of the state. Institutions do that by identifying ways to provide support for disabled students, parenting students, religious and racial minorities, and members of the armed forces. Current statewide data indicates that Black students are significantly under-represented at state universities, so the argument that programs designed to support those students are somehow discriminatory has no basis in evidence or “truth.”

In any form, this legislation (along with SB 18) will make Texas university faculty fearful to address these issues in their classrooms and scholarship. And anything that curtails academic freedom will limit that kinds of work that is able to take place in the state, and greatly undermine the quality of higher education in the state.

Orlando Lara, Mr.
Self, Future Professor
Spring, TX

As a Spring native and constituent of the bill author, I highly oppose SB 17. I do not believe it can be amended. It materially misrepresents what Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion programs do and minimizes the problems these programs attempt to address. It elevates a problem that simply does not exist. White men and women continue to make up the majority of faculty positions on campus and white students are still very well-represented on most college campuses. Additionally, there are still many conservative and moderate faculty on campus. Above all, the bill mis-represents what kind of diversity higher ed institutions are truly responsible for addressing: racial, gender, and income-based diversity, to name a few, not a diversity of political party affiliation. The Texas legislature simply cannot and should not be in the business of measuring and regulating political party affiliation and certainly should not favor one political party over another when it comes to creating higher ed policy. This bill explicitly favors Republican men and women, since it is their point of view that is purportedly "disadvantaged" or under-represented on college campuses. The empirical reality does not bear this out. There are still a plethora of conservative students groups on campus. The Texas legislature should not be in the business of reshaping or redistributing the spectrum of political opinions found on campus, and yet that is exactly what this bill attempts to do. In short, no credible burden of proof has been met to justify defunding and removing all DEI programs from college campuses. It is entirely misguided at the root. This legislation will lead, eventually, to mass unrest on college campuses, once students of color and other minority students start to see their most beloved campuses programs and departments dismantled.

Leland Murphy

Self - Former UT Austin Student Government President; Student Worker; Student
Canton, TX

This bill is incredibly harmful for students, Texans, higher education, the Texas economy, and more. As a student who just graduated from the University of Texas at Austin with a degree in government, I could not have made it here without the support of different resources and programs from across campus. I am originally from Kennedale, Texas - a small town in the Dallas/Fort-Worth metroplex. Now, my family lives in Canton, Texas - another small town just a bit more north of DFW. Additionally, I come from a family of modest means. While I was able to be heavily involved at UT and become a better servant leader for this state and country, I could not have done so without the support of programs that typically fall under the diversity, equity, and inclusion umbrella. These programs and policies make our universities better places for everyone. These programs allow us to create the next generation of world changers who will become top leaders across the state, nation, and world. It is incredibly important that we allow these offices and programs the flexibility and ability to support students of all the different and diverse backgrounds we have in Texas. To pass this bill will cause immense damage to our great state and to our world-class institutions of higher learning.

Rachel Gonzalez-Martin, Dr.

Self

Austin, TX

I am a single mother of a little Texan, a teacher and a scholar. DEI services at the University of Texas provide a much needed support system for informing our professional environments and making them tenable as productive and supportive work spaces that reflect our various experiences in society but also in history. DEI work endeavors to level an uneven playing field offering training and competency expectations to keep the staff and faculty at the university. I arrived to my new faculty position eager to work hard and earn my salary everyday but I also had a small baby just born at home. DEI trainings helped me realize that I had the right to work and figure out how to pump breast milk for my son at work, because I didn't falter on my professional commitments and never took leave—I was eager to work, but also needed help, resources to make it possible for me to continue to do so—the inception of quiet lactation rooms in my building was a huge advancement. The humiliation of pumping breast milk in a faculty office with limited privacy and sanitary services cannot be fully explained here. However, is the commitment of DEI offices on campus that made me aww that I didn't need to quit my job, or I didn't deserve to be punished for starting a family and following my professional dream of joining the faculty at the University of Texas. Removing DEI services from University campuses in Texas is tantamount to giving majority communities the abusive privilege to revert to systems of preferential treatment for those who best reflect only majority communities— Without DEI, preferential treatment will be given to those from majority backgrounds because efforts to recruit a diverse pool of job applicants will likely not be allowed under SB 17.

Daniel Pineda, Dr.

Self, Assistant Professor of Mechanical Engineering at UT San Antonio
San Antonio, TX

The passage of SB 17, particularly with its overly vague language and definitions, could contribute to the loss of several millions of dollars in federal grants which are designated specifically for minority serving institutions (MSIs), a category of higher education institution which includes Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSIs) and Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). Several California public universities—including UC Berkeley, UC Los Angeles, and UC San Diego—are actively vying for designation as MSIs to obtain access to these federal grants, and they will reap the benefits of our short-sightedness if this bill is passed. Most importantly, Texas is an incredibly diverse state, and diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) efforts at public institutions of higher education exist to enhance the educational experience for all Texans, including those from populations that have been historically excluded or discouraged from higher education. These designations of diversity are not just based on race, sex, or color. They include veterans, working students, students who are parents, students from rural areas, older students, and those with disabilities. My field of Mechanical and Aerospace Engineering specifically suffers from an under-represented population of both Latino/Latina and female students and faculty, populations which encompass a large portion of Texans. This systemic under-representation exists up to the national level in my field, and Texas has a unique opportunity to lead the way in addressing these inequities in STEM for the nation. Studies have shown that these students are more likely to pursue and stay in engineering if they observe representation and role models among faculty, and if they are supported through targeted programs like the kind that are typically supported by DEI initiatives and offices. The largest national players in the aerospace industry—especially those who have a presence in Texas—all have their own initiatives and programs to recruit and retain a diverse workforce. If this bill passes, we will harm Texans' competitiveness for these jobs, and these companies will be better off recruiting from universities in other states.

Mattan Erez

Self

Rollingwood, TX

Dear Committee Members, I urge you to reject SB17 outright. Scientific research has shown that diverse teams and environments lead to more creative and novel ideas being generated. Novel ideas drive innovation and economic growth. Please do not let SB17 slow the future Texas economy. Given the importance of diversity, equity and inclusion are simply means of achieving and maintaining diversity. Equity ensures that everyone can succeed and inclusion ensures that everyone who can succeed is welcome. These are clearly necessary conditions for diversity to thrive. Achieving these goals is difficult and offices dedicated to the task are crucial to success. Please ignore the grandstanding (on either side) regarding these important issues and goals and stop SB17 from advancing. Diversity, with its supporting goals of equity and inclusion, is a worthy objective and in no way suggests that some should be denied opportunities offered to others. Reject the tone and goals of SB17, which suggest otherwise and vilify those tasked with attaining worthy objectives. Instead, I encourage you to work with the Senate on providing additional dedicated funding to DEI efforts so that the programs have ample resources to support all students, faculty, and staff without needing to offer their constrained resources to only a subset. I am testifying myself as an individual and am not representing any group, individual or organization.

Sonya Alemán, Dr.
self, Associate Professor
San Antonio, TX

My name is Sonya M. Alemán. I am a tenured professor in the department of Race, Ethnicity, Gender, and Sexuality Studies at the University of Texas at San Antonio. My testimony today is offered as a private citizen. It addresses SB17, which seeks to eliminate diversity, equity and inclusion initiatives and centers in higher education.

For the last two years, I have served as the Director of the Women's Studies Institute at UTSA, a research center dedicated to providing access to interdisciplinary knowledge about women, gender, and sexuality through transdisciplinary collaboration among researchers and through public programming to make research accessible to audiences on and off the UTSA campus. Under this new legislation, this center would cease to exist.

With over two decades of history at UTSA, the Women's Studies Institute has become a mainstay for the campus, San Antonio, and Texas. It has highlighted the important knowledge production that has been generated in the field of women's studies, sharing it with our undergraduates, faculty, and community members throughout the greater San Antonio area. Nearly 1,000 panels, workshops, to keynote addresses, and award presentations have been coordinated through UTSA's Women's Studies Institute, recognizing the gains made and challenges women still face in business, science, politics, leadership, education, health care, sports, policing, to name but a few. This intentional, meaningful and necessary focus on women's issues has helped ensure the struggles and achievements of women is documented, enriched, and celebrated. Given that historically, women in this country were not given access as full citizens to the nation's institutions and opportunities, it is imperative that academic centers like this one continue to be supported and resourced so that students attending Texas' universities and colleges, will continue to have access to the histories and ways of knowing from half of nation's population. I urge you to vote against this bill.

Elviniecka Carrington
self MSW student
Georgetown, TX

Hello, my name is Elviniecka Carrington. I am an MSW student at Prairie View A&M University. I do not agree that SB 17. Before I was born, I was Black because you could see by looking at my parents that I was Black. Throughout my life, I have been judged because I am Black, not because I am a veteran who served by county, but by the color of my skin. SB 17 takes away from my ability to congregate with other Black individuals in a place I feel safe. By passing these bills, you are taking away my support system and growth.

Virginia Raymond

SELF, lecturer at UTSA and lawyer

Austin, TX

Dear Members of the House,

My name is Virginia Marie Raymond and I am writing on my own behalf to express my opposition to SB 17. I am not speaking on behalf of any group or institution.

Working as a literacy volunteer in my thirties, I discovered that studying and discussing literature could be an effective way to have profoundly important conversations about personal pain and systemic injustice, without people getting defensive, angry at one another, or simply shutting down. Although a bookworm myself, I had not before experienced the power of people reading together. What I learned caused me to re-think the direction of my life; in, 2000, I enrolled in the “ethnic and third world literature” program in English at the University of Texas at Austin. Because I had absolutely no previous exposure to Mexican American literature, I dove into the field.

As a graduate student and lecturer teaching “ethnic studies” at UT Austin, and now as a lecturer at UT San Antonio, I have witnessed the tremendous excitement of undergraduates who for the first time encounter studies of the U.S. that include people of Mexican, African, Asian, and indigenous descent; their distinct literature and cultures; and all of our shared history. Many students have never read a novel (with the possible exception of *House on Mango Street*) by a Mexican American author before; their exposure to African American literature is also lamentably weak. When they are exposed to a broader and deeper range of literature, their understanding of the U.S. and their place here deepens.

All students, of all backgrounds, benefit from academic programs that strive for diversity, inclusion, and equity.

Since the Spring semester of 2020, I have been very fortunate to teach courses in Mexican and Mexican American literature, as well as the literature of the Black Anglophone Caribbean, at the University of Texas at San Antonio. Again I witness students’ joy, curiosity, and engagement with these texts. Moreover, to study Mexican and Caribbean literature is to view the U.S. from the perspective of close neighbors, and to gain deeper insight into U.S. history.

But all of these life-changing, life-saving resources will mean little if we do not have a student body that is diverse in terms of ethnicity and “race,” age, disability, veteran status, gender identity and expression, sexual orientation, religion, and in all other ways. Our books and teaching materials will be wasted if we do not act to include all students. Our words we will be meaningless if we do not treat all students equitably and fairly.

My hero is the cellist Yo-Yo Ma. When Mr. Ma reminds us that “culture connects us,” he is not limiting the observation to music. Literature promotes empathy and understanding, and it does so most effectively in diverse, equitable, and inclusive settings. Texas would be foolish to cut any “DEI” initiatives.

Thank you for your attention.

Sincerely

Virginia Marie Raymond, JD,

Laura Fonken
University of Texas
Austin, TX

Hello, I'm Laura, writing as a private citizen. I have experience as a faculty member at the University of Texas at Austin. Eliminating diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) programs in Texas will have negative effects on the state and its people, both in the short and long term. These consequences include reduced innovation, decreased financial opportunities, and limited access to talented individuals.

DEI initiatives bring new ideas to our community and attract top-tier funding and personnel. Unfortunately, concerns over unnecessary exclusion and anti-DEI sentiment are already making it difficult to attract the best job candidates to Texas.

I am a native Texan who cherishes living and teaching in this state and am raising my three children here, and I am committed to supporting the success of our students and fellow Texans. One of the keys to maintaining our state's growth is to allow all individuals to prosper and to promote diversity initiatives that attract individuals from all backgrounds. By doing so, we can boost innovation and attract talented individuals and financial resources to Texas.

I strongly encourage you to vote against SB17 and to support learning, innovation, success, and financial growth.

Delaina Bishop
SELF/Parent
Austin, TX

I OPPOSE this bill.

Karen Kendall
Self-Retired Human Resources Executive
Dallas, TX

I'm Speaking as a Private Individual.
I oppose SB 17.

Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) programs on college campuses are under attack. So many false claims have been made about what DEI programs do and the impact they have (or lack thereof according to some of the legislators). I personally have experienced the incredible positive impact of these programs and have led these kinds of programs for over 30 years.

Organizations and corporations who include DEI as part of their mission have benn provem to be morr profitable. Profits in the end are good for Texas - more taxes, more jobs...!

Gary Bledsoe, Mr.

Texas NAACP

Austin, TX

I am President of the Texas NAACP. Though our mission is to eliminate unnecessary color distinctions within our country, we want to make it clear that we support all of Texas—black, brown, white, conservative or liberal. However, Senate Bill 17 is an attack against the African-American and other minority communities that will cause great harm to many others as collateral damage.

Most DEI programs are very moderate and they seek merely to help students who may be or feel disaffected while providing for more inclusion and opportunity for all. The DEI programs: (i) nurture students including disabled, rural, ex-military and disabled students in addition to minority students and LGBTQ students. We must avoid being provincial because this will threaten our State's graduates competitiveness with other States.

The presence of DEI programs on college campuses has had a positive impact on the campuses at large and helped to generate atmospheres of community where people more frequently engage in cross-cultural or cross-racial learning, dialogue and meaningful communications. And we want to kill this because of racial hatred. Yes, racial hatred—this is what this bill is all about. Somewhere, somehow individuals have determined that attacking racial and ethnic minorities is good politics, so the State's interest in unity and prosperity must give way to these good politics. Proponents of this bill realize that it will harm minority students, minority professors and minority staff and consider damage to all others as mere collateral damage.

I want to make several points for you to consider:

- i. Those pushing this legislation stated on the record they were unfamiliar with DEI Programs;
- ii. Texas A & M University recently did a study in 2021 that concluded there were numerous benefits from their DEI program and it should be expanded—before this manufactured political movement started.
- iii. Research grants, private and federal, generally have a component that requires recipients to have some version of a viable DEI program;
- iv. Accrediting bodies have required DEI components within their list of essential criteria for Colleges and Universities seeking accreditation (in an incredible move the Senate decided that they could control accrediting bodies);
- v. DEI programs generally assist more than minority students directly;
- vi. DEI programs generally assist all students at least indirectly;
- vii. Elimination of DEI programs will harm many students academic progress in substantial ways;
- viii. The elimination of DEI programs will cause a brain drain of students and also of faculty and prospective faculty;
- ix. Will harm graduation rates;
- x. Will harm the national reputation of Texas' colleges and universities;
- xi. Will cost serious financial losses to colleges and universities; and
- xii. Will lead to a wave of unnecessary lawsuits that we could avoid.

At difficult times we must ask where do our allegiances lie? Sometimes ones career position must give way

Rosa Alcalá

Self

El Paso, TX

Although I am writing to you a private citizen, my opposition to SB 17 is based on nearly 20 years of experience as an educator in the UT system. DEI does not divide but instead creates an inclusive environment, which in turn creates a richer learning environment. Moreover, DEI statements help candidates clarify how they will support through their teaching this inclusivity. I am concerned that if DEI programs and efforts were banned, Texas universities would lose federal grants, hurting students and faculty.

Lisa Henry
higher education
Denton, TX

My name is Lisa Henry and I am a professor at the University of North Texas. I am writing to share my opposition to S.B. 17 proposed in the Texas state legislature that may prohibit institutions from fostering inclusive environments for all students.

It is important to me that Texas Public Colleges and Universities provide an inclusive education that welcomes all students. We know that students are more successful when they see themselves represented in the faculty and staff of the learning environment, when they feel like they belong, and when they feel safe to learn.

For all these reasons, I strongly urge you to oppose S.B. 17.

Sincerely,

Lisa Henry

Lilia Rosas, Dr.
Self and professor
Austin, TX

I'm Lilia Rosas, and I'm speaking for myself as a private individual. I am writing to express why I am against SB 17. I am also a professor in Mexican American and Latina/o Studies at UT Austin. I have been employed by educational institutions for over 20 years where I have worked as a teaching assistant, tutor, adjunct professor, lecturer, and assistant professor of instruction. In these two decades, I have learned, experienced, and witnessed how incredibly urgent and necessary DEI initiatives, programs, and policies are to higher education as they foster well-being, welcomeness, and openness for students, staff, and faculty who everyday are critical to public colleges and institutions across the state of Texas. In these last decades, I can also recall a campus climate prior to DEI, where unintentional biases, microaggressions, and even hostility were part and parcel of the university setting. Yet, I noticed the immediate and persist difference DEI made in centering the voices and experiences of people of color, women, LGBTQAI+ persons, working-class people, and people with disabilities (to name a few communities), whose perspectives and insights were, and often continue to be, neglected, ignored and/or omitted from leadership, governance, and daily operations when DEI is not integral to the university's infrastructure. I, therefore, urge you to vote against SB 17 so we can instead nurture Texas universities where all stances are valued with attention to diversity, equity, and inclusion. Moreover, we prioritize the needs, views, and direction of the historically minoritized communities, who understand that it is paramount to create a place of learning where we are not just in the institution but we are a crucial part of it.

Kristin Bonds
self, Talent Consultant
Austin, TX

My name is Kristin Bonds and I am here as a private citizen and small business owner in Texas. I am a native Texan and I staunchly oppose SB 17.

I am 34 years old. I grew up in Plano, TX and attended Plano East Senior High, where I graduated top 2% of my class, a shoe-in to the prestigious Business Honors program at the McCombs School for Business at The University of Texas. I had never heard of coding or software engineering until I came to college.

I speak now as a participant in the corporate side of this conversation, having spent my career in People and Talent Acquisition at some of the most prestigious tech companies in the world. I learned what coding is, and realized it is part of the technological movement that no one exists without. And when those companies that build the products that run the world look for talent, they often seek out students from the Engineering department at UT. The problem is, not very many of them are women, black, hispanic, or disabled.

The reason why the talent pool is so homogenous, even now, for graduating students in tech-related fields is because women and underrepresented students aren't given the opportunity to pursue these careers. These subjects aren't available in K-12 schools (95% of Texas K-12 students don't have access to Computer Science classes), and our society pushes them out of this choice despite their interest.

Today, my 21-year-old niece sits in Aerospace engineering classes at Texas A&M, the only woman in the room of a hundred. It seems that not much has changed between our high school graduation dates.

I oppose SB 17 because it outlaws the exact programs that pave the way for women and people of color to enter the workforce in STEM-related fields, and change everyone's futures for the better. Programs like the Women in STEM Girls Day at UT open the door to women and men of all races and ethnicities to learn about potential career pathways that simply aren't on the table otherwise. The business case for diversity is obvious, but in this room I'll make it clear: just like the tropical rainforest, ecological diversity makes an environment more resilient and more strong. We are better for it. Launching the Women in Engineering program at UT raised the percentage over women students by 20% overnight because it carved a pathway that otherwise was invisible without clear recognition.

We'll make better products and have better ideas if we have diverse minds with diverse perspectives building things. To benefit from that, we must allow those pathways to be accessed by everyone. Disallowing programs that teach, share, and support diversity at academic institutions directly influences Texan students and their chance to participate in our economy, in our workforce. Why? Because these are the only programs that exist to include them and foster their interests in these fields and even academic pursuits at large. I encourage you to oppose SB 17.

Kimberly Nixon, Dr.

self, University Professor of Pharmacology & Toxicology
Austin, TX

Abolishing DEI programs will hurt science and technology advancement in the state and be a financial disaster for this state.

I am a Professor of Pharmacology & Toxicology at a major university in Austin, TX writing in as a private citizen. Important context – I am a white woman, raised in Keller, TX, the 1st person on my mom’s side to get a college degree and the 1st person to obtain a doctorate in the entire family.

I was recruited back to my home state in 2018 due to the excellence of my research and training programs, bringing multiple millions of grant dollars to the state. Currently, I am a director of a federally funded training program, a “T32,” for graduate students and postdoctoral scientists (training after receiving their PhD) at a major university in Austin, TX. I successfully renewed this nearly \$2.3 million dollar grant in 2022 due in part to my successful DEI recruitment and retention plan. However, did you know that there are over 60 such programs across the state? \$20.9 million dollars come into the state EACH YEAR to fund scientific training, and this is only from the National Institutes of Health (NIH). NIH is one of the many institutions which awards grants based on DEI efforts.

Each of these types of grants are awarded based on their “Recruitment and Retention Plan to Enhance Diversity.” It is a discrete section of the application but carries strong influence into multiple parts of the application, such as faculty quality and student sections. We are evaluated based on the diversity of our training faculty and our success in recruiting and retaining diverse students. The peer review committees look at the percentage of women, the percentage of faculty from underrepresented races/ethnicities and the percentage from disadvantaged backgrounds (raised in poverty &/or parents who didn’t attend college). Thankfully we were lauded for our multi-level commitment to recruiting and retaining faculty, students, and postdoctoral trainees as well as our past successes in doing so.

I am committed to recruiting diverse students not only because of these grant programs but because it is the right thing to do. These programs are in place to level the playing field and have our trainee demographics better match the state’s demographics. If SB17 was in place, I would surely lose this 36 year old grant but more critically so would the other 60+ programs across the state.

Decisions about DEI should not be driven by money, but SB17 will have the unintended disastrous consequence of moving the state of Texas’s research universities from the top of the rankings to the bottom as we become non-competitive for major federal research funding. This is exactly the opposite of Governor Abbott’s goal of making Texas #1 in research.

DEI is critical to the success of research. Diverse backgrounds bring diverse perspectives and ideas – all necessary to fuel novel discovery to drive the advancement of science, medicine, and technology.

Diane Dowdey, Dr.

self professor
Crockett, TX

As someone employed in higher education for fifty plus years, I have seen the growing disparity between the faculty and the students as the students do not see their lives and experiences reflected by the faculty. Texas students of higher education have simply become more diverse in age, economic status, ethnicity, and nationality. In order to attract and keep the best students, the future employees and entrepreneurs of Texas, we need to create higher education spaces that reflect these students. SB 17 will have a disastrous impact on Texas's universities ability to attract and retain quality faculty. It will prevent institutions from applying for grants designated for Hispanic Serving Institutions. Many Texas universities have spent much time and effort gaining that designation, only to have its impact completely eliminated by SB 17. Universities in Texas are the greatest engine we have for social mobility, for improving the lives of Texans. Do not allow this bill to be voted out of committee.

Suzanne Pritzker

Self

Houston, TX

My name is Suzanne Pritzker. I am speaking for myself as a private citizen to oppose SB 17.

I am a tenured professor at the University of Houston's Graduate College of Social Work, a top-30 social work program. Alongside faculty colleagues, I design and implement a learning environment that prepares social work students to address mental health and social service needs across Texas.

State leaders have long been aware of our serious mental health workforce shortages. COVID exacerbated these concerns, as Texans' mental health needs grew to unmanageable levels. Texas ranks last in the country in access to mental health care - the U.S. government designates 98% of our counties as "mental health professional shortage areas." Mental health care shortages like those we see in hospitals, schools, and jails are especially concerning in light of recent tragedies Texans have faced, including the winter storm, natural disasters like Hurricane Harvey, and mass shootings.

In this context, high quality, inclusive, and supportive social work education is a necessity. Despite Texas' racial and ethnic diversity, 85% of Texas mental health workers identify as white, and one-fifth offer mental health services in a non-English language. People across Texas benefit when programs admit diverse student bodies and support students in building understanding around diversity and inclusion. At UH, over 60% of the future social workers I teach are students of color - with the support of DEI efforts, our faculty increasingly reflect our student body.

Diversity, equity, and inclusion are foundational to social work curricula and teaching; these supportive learning environments help prepare social workers to connect, empathize, and assist people in their healing processes. DEI is so integral to social work education that national accreditation standards explicitly require all of Texas' 54 accredited social work programs to incorporate and assess DEI in program governance, curricula, and across the student learning experience.

The bill's limits on DEI and the vagueness around which DEI efforts will be prohibited risk serious harm to quality social work education and practice and raise critical questions about whether Texas' 54 accredited social work programs will be able to continue to meet national accreditation standards. This is a risk Texas cannot afford to take.

Eliminating DEI practices from Texas' universities directly challenges social work faculty's freedom to design learning experiences according to our expertise; it harms our ability to foster supportive environments where future social workers learn to provide the dignified and responsive care so desperately needed in our state. I ask that you allow Texas universities to continue to provide high-quality, accredited education that prepares social workers to walk alongside diverse Texans in their times of need and provide them each with compassionate, caring mental health and social services.

April Martin
self
Denton, TX

As a Texas A&M alum, a current UNT graduate student, and a very concerned citizen, I would like to express my strong opposition to SB17. During my time as both an undergraduate and graduate student, I have experienced first-hand the positive impact of my universities' dedication to critical thinking and principles of diversity, equity, and inclusion. DEI programs and offices have offered me not only invaluable financial aid as a first generation college student, but incredibly meaningful support and community, as well. Bills such as SB17 would erase the unique perspectives and experiences that each of us bring to the classroom and to our campuses as a whole. Furthermore, they would endanger the ability of Texas universities to foster meaningful social and learning environments that provide students with the academic, professional, social, and emotional skills required to succeed in the world beyond higher education.

I have always been incredibly passionate about education—that's why I'm in graduate school and hoping to pursue a PhD. My passion for equitable, accessible education that encourages critical thinking is also why I am writing this comment right now. There seems to be this idea going around that professors and DEI are attempting to indoctrinate students, but I would like to express how, in my experience (and in the experience of classmates and friends who have shared their stories with me), that couldn't be further from the truth. For the longest time, I struggled to find my place in society and in the world—there were so many things that felt like they didn't make sense, and I was stuck trying to navigate all of that to figure out who I am and what I stand for. It wasn't until I started graduate school, where for the first time I was surrounded by professors and classmates who coaxed me out of my comfort zone and encouraged me to think critically about my own experiences and desires, that I began to feel like I truly belonged somewhere. The feelings of self-awareness, community, and support provided by programs and classroom environments that emphasize diversity, equity, and inclusion have been essential not only to my success as a student, but invaluable to my ability to grow into the person I am today.

Under SB17, programs such as the first generation college student scholarship I received and offices such as the Multicultural Center or the Pride Alliance at UNT that provide necessary support to vulnerable students could be in jeopardy—therefore risking these students' academic success, social and emotional wellbeing, and even future stability. DEI does not represent indoctrination, preferential treatment, or political values; it represents a commitment to providing *all* students the tools and support they need to learn, to grow, and to thrive. With this in mind, I urge you to protect DEI and academic freedom by voting NO to SB17.

Lanessa Bass
Self, Pediatrician
Richmond, TX

I am a pediatrician who helps recruit and train future pediatricians. I have personally seen the importance of having a varied group of physicians (and others) to provide the best care for our population of patients. Respecting everyone's past experiences does not favor one over another, but creates strong teams able to identify issues and solutions.

In Texas and nationally the health care disparities faced by minority patients/families and groups makes it imperative we such for factors that have led to those gaps. If we are limited in honest exploration of reasons, we will continue to struggle in health outcomes.

Lastly, it is required by our national accreditation bodies that our residents receive training on exact words and issues that would be "forbidden"

By SB 17. It will dramatically impact our ability to meet those compliance issues and will make Texas less attractive for our students to train here in the state.

Inclusion is not exclusion. Reaching for equity in outcomes is not favoring one over another but ensuring that all can rise together. Which will make for a healthier more vibrant Texas.

Thank you.

Patrick Henry Smith, Dr.
Self, University Professor
Kingsbury, TX

Greetings and thank you for this opportunity to provide feedback on SB 17. My name is Patrick Henry Smith. I am a member of the Texas Faculty Association, writing for myself as a private citizen representing no organization or institution. I write in opposition to SB 17.

I am a professor of Curriculum & Instruction at one of the largest teacher preparation programs in Texas. I teach future Bilingual and ESL teachers who are studying to become elementary and middle school teachers. Texas is facing a critical teacher shortage. Nearly in five school children in Texas lives in a home where a language other than English is spoken. As the number of emergent bilingual students in our state continues to grow, the teacher shortage is especially acute in the area of Bilingual and ESL Education.

School districts across our state recognize that the bilingual teacher shortage is negatively impacting their ability to deliver high quality education to English language learners. To attract certified bilingual teachers, districts are paying annual stipends of between \$4,000-\$6,000. This the case in Guadalupe County where I live; in Hays County, where I teach; and in Bexar, Caldwell, Comal, Gonzalez, Williamson, and Harris counties, where many of my university students come from.

The legislation proposed in SB 17 would undermine our ability to attract and prepare the Bilingual and ESL teachers that are so badly needed in our state. Issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion are at the heart of what Bilingual and ESL teachers must know to be effective teachers. My current students, most of whom are women of Mexican American backgrounds, benefit from university programs and services that promote diversity, equity, and inclusion. They benefit from state funding, federal grants, and student scholarships that support equity and diversity. They benefit from university courses and programs of study that prepare teachers to work effectively with linguistically and culturally diverse students, families, and communities.

I am also concerned that SB 17, by removing these vital services, would lead to fewer students becoming Bilingual teachers. This semester I am teaching a course called Diversity and Equity in Education, where first year students learn about how issues of race, ethnicity, gender, language, socioeconomic status, neurodiversity, and disability impact teaching and learning. Students who are thinking of becoming bilingual teachers are intimidated by the potential loss of diversity, equity, and inclusion services if SB 17 becomes law. They want to know if bilingual educators are still wanted in our state. SB 17 undermines efforts to recruit and train bilingual and ESL teachers.

Ultimately, it is the school children of Texas who will suffer most if SB 17 is becomes law. I respectfully urge the members of the House Higher Education Committee to support future teachers and their emergent bilingual students by voting against this harmful legislation.

D.S. Zamora, Mrs.
Self - Retired
Houston, TX

I ****OPPOSE**** this bill.

It will damage our ability to get funding for faculty research.

It will damage the rankings awarded to Texas universities by national publications, which will in turn damage our ability to recruit students from out of state. The last I knew, we must have students paying out of state tuition to keep our university systems operating. Has that changed? If so, information about that change needs to be disseminated more widely.

It will damage our ability to recruit well-qualified scholars for faculty positions. Some of the best ones we have will be looking to be hired by private institutions or they'll just flat leave for other places. We've done way too much work on raising the bar at our best schools to have some batch of incompetent fools ruin it.

Simon Lee

Self

Austin, TX

I write as a private citizen to offer testimony and register my opposition to SB17, a shameful bill advanced by political opportunists, one built on conspiracy theories, fabricated outrage, and old-fashioned racism. This bill is unsurprising given its authors' fetish for rolling back civil liberties while championing inequality under the guise of Christian nationalism. It represents yet another attempt by political extremists to quash the notion of education as a public good in order to advance their own agenda of political control. An educated populace, it goes without saying, is a direct threat to Senator Creighton's plans, which is why farcical bills such as SB17 are presented under the pretense of concern. As a resident of the state, I am troubled that such dangerous proposals are even entertained let alone taken seriously. As it stands, SB17 is designed to target historically marginalized groups and to help sustain the notion that education is reserved for a homogenous elite.

Similar to SB18, SB17 is structured around logic that is as flawed as its author's moral compass. Also similar to SB18, SB17 is engineered to attenuate educational opportunities in exchange for performative clout and political power. In this particular case, I am unsurprised to see that Senator Creighton is, once again, attempting to pass legislation that aims to harm Texas residents for the primary purpose of upholding white supremacy and a cultural elite. The bill is written to ensure that historically marginalized individuals remain locked out from educational possibilities. This is, once more, because such individuals would also pose a direct threat to the Senator's personal ambitions, hence the proposal of the bill that would ensure only the "right kind" of Texas residents could gain access to education and work in the field. The logic at the heart of SB17 is so transparently bigoted and so laughably flawed that consideration of such bills is tantamount to a blight on state governance. While such bills collectively try to erode academic institutions as well as the public's faith in education and civic engagement, what is at the core of this bill is far more sinister since it targets Texas' most marginalized in efforts to elevate and sustain those who are marginalized the least. I urge all listening to oppose this bill and to critically question all future bills built on the fallacious logic of manufactured outrage and thinly-veiled white supremacy.

Mia Markey

self, professor

Austin, TX

My educational path was shaped by my experiences as someone who grew up on farm, was the first generation in my family to go to college, as a person with learning disability that had not been identified in childhood, and as a women in science and engineering. Programs and services designed to support diversity, equity, and inclusion were essential to my educational success. It is heartbreaking that the House is considering passing legislation that would undermine efforts to help ALL students succeed in college. Please oppose SB17 so that Texas colleges can continue to welcome a wide range of viewpoints, prepare students to succeed in an increasingly diverse state, and intentionally foster an inclusive environment in which all can learn from each other.

Eric Stuckey

self, software developer

Austin, TX

This DEI legislation will cost Texas universities millions of dollars in federal grant opportunities due to the requirements within federal guidelines for grant submission and funding. Texas should value the diversity of the state and allow our universities to serve all of the population, including the people of Texas who have had the weight of history pressing against them. Texas' future will be hindered if we do not work to develop all of the people of Texas, and DEI initiatives strengthen us. We are all Texas, and we will all stand or fall together. I grew up in a small, impoverished rural area, and the equity initiatives of the past helped me to become a successful professional. Please do not leave behind the talent in Texas that is waiting to become the next generation of Texas STEM.

Carolyn Lux

Self/Retired nurse

Fredericksburg, TX

I am commenting in favor of SB 17. Please pass this bill. Thank you.

Nicole Woodhouse

Self

McKinney, TX

I OPPOSE THIS BILL. 100% oppose SB 17.

Carolyn Rospierski

Self, Talent Manager

Cypress, TX

As a Talent Manager and HR professional in the state of Texas for 25 years, it is essential to support DEI programs at the Universities. These programs enrich lives of all students. As an employer, we see the benefit of these programs in supporting not just students but also the connection to the community and companies. Texas is a state of diverse people and the university needs to support our diverse population. Additionally, the universities must maintain these programs to complete nationally with other universities. I am a Tx Ex, I have made hiring decisions in this state, I have provided scholarships, I have spoken to students... and the availability of DEI programs do make a difference to choices students and employers make on where to go and where to recruit.

I am a white female; I have a son at UTD studying stem. We may not be the target audience of DEI offices but we derive benefit from a diverse student body that is supported and feels that they too belong in our state universities.

The damage of removing DEI programs will hurt educationally, mentally, financially... for many many years!

VOTE NO ON SB17!

Diane Birdwell, Captain

Self/ high school teacher

Dallas, TX

Stop the insanity. It's bad enough you want to control what is taught in high schools, but colleges, too? What happened to critical thinking, the presentation of various points of view and LEARNING? You are making the Republican Party look like sheep, scared sheep, who are afraid that if people are educated, they won't vote for you. If you care about education, then fund it fully and give it a measure of autonomy.

Jennifer Brewer

Self/teacher

San Angelo, TX

SB 17 makes unnecessary changes to the governance of public colleges and universities. Students and employees must receive training in diversity to promote a safe working and learning environment. Diversity training helps participants become aware of sexist and offensive remarks and actions that could lead to costly legal action. This bill makes the legislature appear insensitive to sexual harassment and racist remarks that can create to a toxic workplace. Stop SB 17 before it costs the state in court fees, lost students, and disgruntled workers.

Patsy Good

Self, retired

Schertz, TX

Stop this insanity. Students, especially college students should be presented various points of view and learn about a variety of things. Stop trying to hinder education at all levels, fund it fully and just stop this!

Linda Evans, Ms

Self

Conroe, TX

Vote No on SB 17

Inclusive and equitable institution benefits everyone!

Diverse representation and inclusive learning environments provide inspiration and aspiration for students to achieve their goals while providing all students with greater cultural awareness and critical thinking skills. Diversity of perspectives from students and faculty with different life experiences produces innovation and a more dynamic academic environment, improving student learning and outcomes across campuses.

We need diversity in schools, businesses, and communities.

Diversity makes us better!

Vote NO SB 17

Kimiko Gordon

Self

Austin, TX

Please vote against this bill SB 17 because it is against DEI efforts in education that is very important and much needed in our educational institutions. As a parent of a African American female student who has a learning impairment, it is very important to have programs and resources that support her learning and that make her feel that she belongs and is welcome to show up as her full self at her university. The programs and resources available at The University of Texas Austin have been so valuable and helpful for her as she went through her first year of college. To loose the DEI initiatives and resources that have helped her so much, would be a tragic mistake. This would be detrimental for not only my daughter, but for countless other students, families and faculty members.

Omar Valerio
self
SAN ANTONIO, TX

Dear Senator Creighton,

I am writing to express my strong opposition to SB 17. As a concerned citizen, an engaged voter, and a faculty member of the University of Texas at San Antonio, I believe this bill would negatively impact the quality of education and academic freedom in our state.

This bill will endanger the ability of Texas colleges and universities to facilitate meaningful learning environments that equip students with the academic, social, and emotional skills they need to navigate the world beyond higher education. It would silence the unique perspectives that each of us bring to the classroom and erase any acknowledgment of social realities that affect all students both in and outside of the learning environment. Suppressing our diversities through extreme oversight of policies and hiring would severely disadvantage the educational institutions of Texas.

Texas universities are world-renowned for their innovations in all disciplines; the oversight and expulsion of DEI would harm everyone in the state across occupational fields and jeopardize the cutting-edge research that makes our state's education so prestigious.

I urge you to vote against this bill and to support policies that protect academic freedom and truth in higher education. Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,

Omar Valerio
815 Sutters Rim
San Antonio, TX 78258

Xiaoqin Li, Dr.
Myself
Austin, TX

DEI does not refer to a single policy. Taking a simple approach to ban DEI hurts public education, students and votes in Texas.

Amy Anderson, Dr.
Self
Lewisville, TX

Dear committee,
I am writing on behalf of myself, a private citizen, and new resident of the state of Texas. I am also an assistant professor at UNT. I am deeply concerned about SB 17 and the negative impact that it will have on our students, academic community, and state of Texas at large. Diversity offices at universities do not divide the campus. They provide vital support to faculty and students on a range of topics, given the growing diversity of students' enrolled. This includes pedagogy, bridging differences in the classroom, supporting learning about culture and various disabilities, and more. Further, as an HSI university there is now access to greater federal funds and new avenues to support the over 25% of Hispanic students at UNT. SB 17 is in stark contrast to this reality of the university and directly in opposition of Gov. Abbott's goals to be a nationally recognized R1 university. I strongly urge you to oppose this bill. Sincerely, Amy Anderson

Stephanie Stanford
Self-Professional Engineer
Austin, TX

I am writing to ask you to not pass this bill. When I was at The University of Texas at Austin the engineering program from 1992-1996, the Women in Engineering program filled a role that administration and faculty were not equipped or tasked to address. Navigating a field of study, the administration and faculty were there to inspire our studies, and WEP was there to assist with coaching and intervention when staff and students told me because I was female, I couldn't be an engineer. The WEP mentored and supported solutions for equality. Please don't eliminate that.

Morgan Kirkpatrick
Self, project assistant and marketing coordinator
LUBBOCK, TX

As a former middle school educator and Lubbock resident, I am FIRMLY in opposition to this bill. It makes no sense to expect more diversity in places when removing the very people who work to ensure that historically marginalized groups are included. Banning students, employees or job applicants from participating in training on DEI, bias, oppression or gender identity, in other words - learning about those who might be different from them, is ludicrous. The members of the legislature would benefit from that training.

More and more these days, the Texas legislature has made being from Texas an embarrassment. Please, stop suggesting solutions to problems that DO NOT EXIST.

Please do not advance this bill.

Geraldine Tucker
Self
Austin, TX

DEI is an important initiative to support diversity in higher education. This bill should be defeated. It is not affirmative action as it is known. DEI enables individuals to be treated equally regardless of their race, sex, color, or national origin. This bill must be defeated.

Geneva Gano, Dr.
self, Professor of English
San Marcos, TX

To Chair Kuempel and the congresspersons considering SB 16, SB 17, and SB 18:

My name is Geneva Gano and I am an Associate Professor of English at Texas State University. I am speaking for myself as a private individual and am testifying against SB 16, SB 17, and SB 18. I want to express my concerns about these bills because they directly affect me, my family, my colleagues, and my students, I believe that my voice is an important one to consider as you weigh the value of these bills.

I came to Texas from Ohio in 2015 because I was recruited and hired by Texas State University for my position as a professor of English. This position is very specialized, yet it attracted more than 150 applicants from a national and international pool. When hired, I left a comparable position at a college in Ohio and moved my family of four in order to take the job.

Texas State University, as you know, is an Emerging Research University and the opportunity to further my research in a dynamic, up-and-coming institution with a core group of experienced, talented colleagues was extremely attractive to me, ultimately leading to my decision to come to Texas.

Most institutions in the United States offer tenure. If this institution did not offer tenure, I would not have considered the position at all.

Since joining the faculty at Texas State University, I have found many successes that would not have been possible without the basic stability and consistent support that tenure offers to research faculty. These included receiving the Golden Apple Teaching award for excellence in teaching, having been named the Jesse H. and Mary Gibbs Jones Professor of Southwestern Studies, publishing a scholarly monograph that has been well received in my field as well as many other academic articles, and convening two internationally-attended symposia on the writer Sandra Cisneros.

My undergraduate and graduate students have won numerous scholarships, successfully applied for and entered law school, business school, and graduate school in the humanities and education, and entered the job force as teachers, entrepreneurs, mental health professionals, and more. Many of my students at Texas State University, a Hispanic Serving Institution, are from historically underserved populations, are veterans, and are first-generation students, meaning that they are the first in their families to attend college. In my role as a professor, I was not simply these students' teacher, I served as a mentor and guide as they forged their career paths. The consistency and long-term support that I provide to my students throughout their college careers and beyond, would be impossible to provide without the stability that tenure offers.

As a professor, I rely on the stability of tenure in order to advance my research and ensure my teaching is successful. Tenure provides me the opportunity to test new and innovative teaching methods and to act as a bold and inquisitive researcher.

Audrey McCann
Self, branding
Austin, TX

Abolishing DEI does the exact opposite of what the bill's founders say it does. Unless we work to achieve society-wide changes beginning from before a child is born to ensure their race, gender, sexuality, religious beliefs, etc do not prevent them from succeeding, DEI-type initiatives and missions in higher Ed are one of the few ways to counter this and ensure a fairer shot at getting into the university and getting a degree. Please vote against SB 17 to ensure the future of Texas belongs to ALL Texans, not just Texans who are prioritized by the system for having "status quo" identities.

Angel Huang

Students Engaged in Advancing Texas (SEAT)

Austin, TX

My name is Angel Huang, I'm a current Sophomore from UT Austin and a member of SEAT, a student org dedicated to creating voices and SEAT in our legislature. Speaking on the behalf students and the current youth, I am heavily against the bill SB-17. Through this bill, it will take away the efforts of diversity, equity, and inclusion built into our school system in order to help empower and include all students and create a diverse and inclusive environment. As an Asian American, I had felt through my k-12 education the detrimental effects of lacking DEI. Growing up in Katy Texas, one of the more diverse school districts with 60% of the student population being a student of color, I was not represented in my education despite how diverse the student population was. Every administrator and 99% of my teachers were white and the lack of diversity has hindered my ability to learn about myself and find safe spaces that understood me and my struggles.

For the first time in my 20 years of going to school, I had my first Asian American professor named professor Jin that taught my Asian American Jurisprudence class. Through the class I learned about the laws, the cases and the history of how the Asian communities and minority communities were continuously excluded and treated as second class citizens while also continuously denied and questioned their rights as Americans. Through this bill, it is evident that there is still a battle and that we still need to fight against the inherent system that was built against BIPOC students. We need DEI because as an Asian American, a woman of color and as a student I can tell you that all students benefit from DEI and all students need DEI in order to have a safe and inclusive learning environment. Having an Asian American Professor for the first time was liberating. I finally had an educator that understood my struggles and my experiences were validated.

In the Grutter V. Bollinger case, through the Amicus Curiae from the Military Corps, the Military Corps urged the importance of diversity in higher education stating "higher education must be accessible to all individuals regardless of race and ethnicity" and that case also established that diversity is a compelling state interest. So not only is SB-17 killing the needs and the interest of the state, it is also killing the interest of the students who are the ones affected by SB-17.

In the case of Brown V. Board, established separate but equal, was detrimental to students because it "resulted in an inferior education" for black children. It hindered black children from obtaining a full education and although in technicality black children were getting an education, they didn't get a full education due to segregation.

If we remove the efforts of DEI, it is supporting the past doings of segregation because in order to be anti-segregation and anti-discrimination we need to be actively supporting Diversity, equity and inclusion efforts.

Jolene Ramsey, Dr

Self - professor

College Station, TX

I am writing as a private citizen who is also a pre-tenure faculty member at Texas A&M University. As a first-generation college student who was a fortunate participant in student success programming, and who strives to help other students from all backgrounds humble and otherwise succeed for the good of our state and nation, the policies motivating and set forth in SB 17 are alarming. I strong oppose the sentiment and potential actions set forth therein and urge you to revise or restart this legislation with more stakeholder remarks taken into consideration.

Pat Glowack

Self

Austin, TX

Please oppose SB 17. We should be celebrating the rich diversity of our communities, not trying to ban or ostracize those you may feel are different. The role of government should be bringing communities together - not destroying them by using the hate of a few to create suspicion and mistrust.

Amanda Cargile

Myself

Lubbock, TX

I've spent many years working with tweens and teens. This bill shows a lack of understanding regarding people. I ask that you do not vote for this bill.

Cameron Samuels

self - student

Katy, TX

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion have been central to my positive first-year experience at a university. Because I did not have an affirming K-12 school environment for my queer, disabled, and Jewish identity, I was faced with trauma and adversity that hindered my learning and growth. Students deserve an education where they see themselves represented, a campus environment where they feel included, and an educational experience that meets their needs. I oppose SB 17 and any legislative effort challenging DEI. Let's celebrate the diversity of Texas, not suppress our fellow Texans.

Priscilla Nguyen, Structural Engineer (SE)

Self, Structural Engineer

Houston, TX

I oppose SB 17. As a first-generation Latina and Asian college student, I would not be where I am as a fully licensed structural engineer, without the DEI programs I participated in while studying architectural engineering at UT Austin.

Tyler Wade

Self, college admissions

Dallas, TX

Good Morning Chairman and Representatives,

My name is Tyler Wade and I am testifying against SB 17. Though I am employed in higher education, I am providing this testimony on behalf of myself as a private citizen, and not on behalf of my employer.

Diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) means the practice and policies of including the many communities, identities, races, ethnicities, backgrounds, abilities, cultures, and beliefs of our current society, and pays special attention to underserved communities. By "underserved community" I mean those who have been systematically denied a full opportunity to participate in aspects of economic, social, and civic life.

SB 17 takes a direct aim at DEI programs which play a vital role in building inclusive communities of success for our students. DEI-centered programs create unique resources to support the academic success of students from underserved communities and help faculty and staff develop teaching practices that are more inclusive.

These programs include culturally sensitive and appropriate trainings for faculty and staff, first-year programs designed to help students build community on campus, counseling services, health and wellness services, academic assistance, leadership workshops, financial literacy training, resume workshops, and special graduation ceremonies that honor the achievement of students from underserved and underrepresented communities.

Such programs are an important part of making sure that our colleges and universities are safe havens for ALL students. They also play an important role in keeping Texas schools competitive with their national peers and reckoning with the racial history of our state.

I am confident that without these DEI programs, many students would be left behind. Please help us in creating a brighter future for ALL Texans by voting against this bill.

Sincerely,

Tyler Wade

Dallas

Pamela Williamson-Wyllie

self

converse, TX

As a graduate of a school that offered DEI programs, had offices and trainings. The courses offered and programs available were invaluable in ensuring everyone felt, represented. Not only is this important to want to learn about others experiences, but also necessary to affirm the belief that ALL are equal and deserve the opportunities to be treated as such.

Monica Vega

Self

Gonzales, TX

I am against SB 17. College is a time for critical thinking, discussion, and being exposed to diverse people and opinions. Anything that discourages or ignores diversity is wrong.

Sherry Eller

Self

Temple, TX

I SUPPORT SB 17. Please pass quickly out of committee.

Emily Sohns

Self - Engineer

Aledo, TX

I graduated from The University of Texas in 2010 as the ONLY female Aerospace Engineering (atmospheric) candidate. Things have gotten marginally better because of STEM programs for women. DEI programs encourage girls to stick with engineering. This is absolutely critical to our country and our national defense. We need more STEM graduates of all backgrounds. Our near peer threats are now outpacing the US in terms of STEM graduates. These are critical skills that keep our country on the forefront of technology and defense. Our greatest untapped resource in terms of STEM potential includes women and minorities who will be more likely to graduate with the support of DEI initiatives on campus.

Mary Beltran, Dr.

Self. Professor at the University of Texas at Austin

Austin, TX

Please vote for no change for DEI offices at public universities in Texas. These offices and their efforts are meant to make universities a welcoming and enriching place for all students, irrespective of their race or ethnicity. As Texas youth are now majority-minority, DEI offices and their work are tantamount to students doing well at universities and completing their degrees. Passing SB 17 would mean turning back the clock and sending the message to the majority of Texas high school students that they are not welcome in our public universities. It also will mean that many talented new faculty and researchers will refuse to seek employment at Texas universities. Passing SB 17 will keep Texas from staying competitive in all of the fields that are taught. Please vote no on SB 17.

Jersey Robinson

Self, Student

Austin, TX

I am adamantly against the passage of SB 17. As a Black female student at The University of Texas at Austin, DEI not only helps even the playing field for students like myself of historically marginalized groups, but contributes to programs on campus that provide important spaces for belonging and community. This attack on higher educational rights is not acceptable or conducive to a respectable education system in Texas. With the passage of this bill, Texas institutions would dramatically regress and fall behind institutions and education systems of comparable caliber.

It should also be noted that marginalized groups have historically had their rights limited, revoked, or withheld. Should this bill or any other bills intended to constrict the rights and advancement of marginalized peoples, those groups will do what they have always done: take their rights and freedoms. In the words of Dr. Martin Luther King, “freedom is never given voluntarily by the oppressor; it must be demanded by the oppressed”.