

# **TFA** Texas Faculty Association Higher Ed Legislative Report

April 20, 2023

Affiliated with TSTA/NEA

## In the Thick of It

This week, on Thursday, April 20th, we reach the 100-day point of the 88th Legislative Session. With 40 days to go, the daily schedule at the Capitol is evolving, with longer floor sessions in both the House and Senate, and later nights in committee. We are on the edge of the session's "end game." Members, staff and stakeholders are increasingly cognizant of the critical deadlines for bill consideration that begin on May 8. That said, there is still plenty of time for bills that we oppose to pass, making our efforts in the final weeks of the session crucial. Following is an update on three bills we have been watching and working throughout the session.

### SB 16, THE "CRT" BILL

SB 16, referred to as the "CRT" bill by many opponents and proponents, has passed the Senate. The bill was received in the House on April 13th. As of this writing, it is "on the Speaker's desk," awaiting referral to committee. As reported last week, the bill was amended on the Senate floor with serious penalties for faculty who are found to "compel or attempt to compel" students to adopt certain beliefs. The vagueness of the potential offence in the bill, coupled with the specific penalty provisions for "violating the section," continue to be of great concern to faculty members.

### SB 17, ELIMINATING DIVERSITY, EQUITY AND INCLUSION PROGRAMS, AND COLLEGE GOVERNANCE

SB 17 was considered on the Senate floor on April 19th. The debate lasted about four hours, with all votes on the bill and amendments falling precisely along party lines, 19-12. The debate was more a series of impassioned speeches than an actual intellectual engagement, following the pattern established in committee. Additionally, a few amendments were added to the bill, but none changed the essential effect of the legislation. Each side appealed to the other to listen and be flexible, but, clearly, the majority was not swayed by the argument. The bill finally passed just before 10PM and will be reported to the House shortly.

### SB 18, RELATED TO ELIMINATING TENURE IN PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION

SB 18 is on the intent calendar in the Senate and will likely be heard on the floor by the end of the week.

## What You Can Do

Given that all three bills are likely headed for the House, consider contacting your state representative with a preview of these bills and your opinion on them.

Contact offices of members of the House Higher Education Committee regarding these bills. A list of members may be found here: <https://house.texas.gov/committees/committee/?committee=C290>

Contact the office of the Speaker of the House regarding these bills: <https://house.texas.gov/members/speaker/>

Prepare a written statement of 3000 characters or less on each bill. The House now allows electronic submissions on bills once they are officially included on a House committee agenda. Having a statement edited and ready to go will be useful when the bills are posted. We will provide more specific guidance for how to post comments as the likely time for House hearings approaches. A robust body of written comments to the House Higher Education Committee could be very important.

Please remember, as you consider engaging in petitioning government, to use only your personal time, resources and technology to do so, and not the resources of your institution. Also, remember to include a clear statement that you are representing yourself as a private citizen, and not representing your institution. We are entering the final phase of this session, and need you, as concerned stakeholders, to stay engaged through to the closing bell.