



For Immediate Release

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Texas Student and Faculty Advocacy Organizations and Civil Rights Groups Underscore Critical Need for Inclusive Curricula and Programs Before the Texas Senate Hearing on November 11, 2024

Tomorrow, November 11, several student and faculty advocacy organizations and civil rights groups will testify at Monday's Texas Senate Higher Education Subcommittee hearing on the topic "Stopping DEI to Strengthen the Texas Workforce" to underscore the critical need for inclusive curriculum and programs in Texas' colleges and universities. The organizations are united in their call urging State lawmakers to cease policies and actions that harm Texas campus communities and undermine diversity and inclusivity on campus.

The groups, representing a broad range of Texas-based students, faculty, and advocates, will testify to the benefits and importance of diversity, equity, and inclusion student support services and other programs that prepare students for the Texas workforce. Inclusive programs have not only been found to increase retention, degree completion, sense of belonging, cultural awareness, and well-being among campus communities, they also are crucial to principles of academic freedom key to student learning and development including free inquiry, free expression, and open dissent.

The hearing comes amid growing public concern over the Texas Legislature's attacks on programs and policies that foster diversity and inclusivity for college students within the state. On The University of Texas campuses, [311 full-time staff providing services to thousands of students were dismissed this year](#) without warning and without any right to appeal. They were dismissed merely because they had worked in DEI positions prior to S.B. 17 taking effect on January 1, 2024. Before S.B. 17 took effect, they had pivoted to non-DEI positions and roles. [S.B. 17](#) bans DEI offices and programs within the state's public colleges and universities.

The [hearing](#) will take place on Monday, November 11 at 9:00am CT at the State Capitol in room E1.028. The groups who will submit testimony before the committee include [Texas Rising](#), [Texas Students for DEI \(TXS4DEI\)](#), [Texas American Federation of Teachers \(Texas AFT\)](#), [Texas American Association of University Professors \(Texas AAUP-AFT\)](#), [Texas Faculty Association \(TFA\)](#) and the [Legal Defense Fund \(LDF\)](#).

“Diversity, equity, and inclusion are strengths on our college campuses and in our classrooms,” said **Texas Rising Central Texas Organizer Maggie DiSanza (she/they)**. “While S.B. 17 continues stripping our institutions of these foundational values, we must stop any additional slashing of liberal arts courses that develop students’ empathy and connection, preparing us for enriching professional opportunities in Texas and beyond. DEI deserves to be celebrated, free of politics. Together, students, alumni, and Texans must boldly, irrevocably denounce efforts to take our universities back to a dark period in history, when our campuses only welcomed the wealthy and white. Texas students deserve better.”

"As Texas students and alumni, we urge the Texas Senate Subcommittee on Higher Education to recognize the value of cultural awareness and inclusion content embedded across various disciplines," said **Texas Students for DEI Member Sophia Chau**. “These courses have directly contributed to our professional success by enhancing critical thinking, communication, and teamwork skills. We believe that educational experiences fostering a sense of belonging and understanding better prepare students for the diverse challenges of the workforce and benefit our communities at large."

“On campus, free inquiry, free expression, and open dissent are critical for student learning and the advancement of knowledge,” said **Texas AAUP-AFT President Brian Evans**. “For students to have the freedom to learn, faculty need the freedom to teach. Faculty fostering critical thinking in a wide range of topics helps students build the skills they need throughout their lives, including in the workforce. Students don’t learn in a vacuum. This is why faculty and staff help students adjust and thrive on campus and help them connect with a wide range of learning and growth opportunities, both on and off campus. The Texas population is incredibly diverse, and our colleges and universities’ policies, curricula, and programs should be inclusive of their constituents.”

“College campuses must provide a welcoming environment for a melting pot of diverse students and faculty,” said **Texas Faculty Association President Pat Heintzelman**. “Students should be able to learn about the struggles and accomplishments of their fellow students from various backgrounds. Students must learn to recognize and overcome biases to succeed in the current and ever-changing workforce. Faculty must have the freedom to challenge students’ perceptions and views and to teach them to think for themselves. The college classroom should provide a space for students to engage in open dissent and to learn the value of tolerance of ideas contrary to their own. Critical thinking is a learned skill, and faculty need to be able to teach it and to nourish it. Students have a right to learn this skill to prepare them to navigate their roles both as informed citizens and as members of the workforce.”

“Texas’ public colleges and universities are vibrant community centers, meant to reflect and represent the wide range of diversity of identity, background, and academic thought within the state. Yet, attacks on so-called ‘DEI’— designed simply to promote diversity, equity, and inclusivity within campus communities — have disrupted this crucial mission. Inclusive curricula, programs, and policies are critical to the success of all Texas students as learners and as future leaders within Texas’ workforce—especially for Black and other underrepresented students and faculty who disproportionately confront opportunity gaps,” said **Sarah Seo, Law**

and Policy Fellow at the Legal Defense Fund. “Since the implementation of S.B. 17, we have already witnessed its widespread impact on students and faculty, as well as chilling effects across Texas’ public colleges and universities. Texas lawmakers must prevent further harms to the state’s higher education institutions by ending restrictions on DEI and working to ensure that all students, faculty, and campus community members receive the tools and resources they need to thrive.”

Learn more about S.B.17 and efforts to protect truth and inclusivity in Texas’ education system [here](#).

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[Texas Rising](#) – a project of the [Texas Freedom Network \(TFN\)](#) – is building the power of young people in our communities and at the ballot box. Our program organizes and builds power with young people of color in a multi-issue, intersectional social justice framework.

[Texas Students for DEI](#) - We are a state-wide coalition of university students and alumni in Texas that work to protect diversity, equity, and inclusion practices in higher education and beyond. We believe that DEI has a crucial role in not only preparing students for the increasingly diverse world they will graduate into, but also to uplift marginalized communities who have been historically—and currently are—ignored or facing discrimination perpetrated by our own universities.

Texas American Association of University Professors ([Texas AAUP-AFT](#)) - Nationally, [AAUP](#) was founded by faculty in 1915. We champion academic freedom, advance shared governance, and organize all faculty to promote economic security and quality education. [Texas AAUP](#) was founded in 1964 and affiliated with Texas AFT in March, 2024. Here's a [link to join Texas AAUP-AFT](#) and [several reasons](#) to join. Follow us on X [@TexasAaup](#) and [@aaup_utAustin](#).

Texas Council of Faculty Senates ([TCFS](#)) - We are a federation of faculty senates, councils, and assemblies at the 38 Texas public universities. TCFS members discuss faculty governance experiences and issues, and exchange ideas on higher education with members, agents of state government members and staff of the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board and others.

Texas Faculty Association ([TFA](#)) - We support the freedoms of all faculty and staff, and vigorously supports its members. We are stronger together and want to advocate for you! Here's a [link to join TFA](#) and [several reasons](#) to consider joining. Membership is kept confidential. Follow TFA on X [@TXFacultyAssoc](#).

Legal Defense Fund (LDF) - Founded in 1940, the [Legal Defense Fund \(LDF\)](#) is the nation’s first civil rights law organization. LDF’s Thurgood Marshall Institute is a multi-disciplinary and collaborative hub within LDF that launches targeted campaigns and undertakes innovative research to shape the civil rights narrative. In media attributions, please refer to us as the Legal Defense Fund or LDF. Please note that LDF has been completely separate from the

National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) since 1957—although LDF was originally founded by the NAACP and shares its commitment to equal rights.