



TLEEC Supports Texas College Students' Access to Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Services

TLEEC Testimony on Implementation of SB 17, submitted by Rebekah Skelton to the Texas Senate Subcommittee on Higher Education, May 14, 2024

Dear Chairman Creighton and Members of the Senate Subcommittee on Higher Education:

My name is Rebekah Skelton, and I am testifying on the harmful impacts of the implementation of Senate Bill 17 on behalf of the Texas Legislative Education Equity Coalition (TLEEC). TLEEC is a statewide collaborative with the mission to improve the quality of public education for all children, focusing on racial equity. We advocate at the local, state, and national levels for high-quality education, including enhanced college access and success.

During the 88th Regular Session, TLEEC testified against SB 17 due to its anticipated discriminatory impact on historically marginalized college students, including Black, Latino, first-generation and LGBTQ+ students and students in families with limited means. Although the law only went into effect in January, SB 17 has already resulted in a deep chilling effect on student, faculty and administrator free speech; the availability of campus-based student support services; and students' college access and affordability opportunities across Texas colleges and universities (Kepner, 2024). Under pressure to comply with the law, universities have taken drastic actions that have negatively impacted the well-being of campus communities and rolled back decades of progress in equity and inclusion.

In recent months, Texas colleges and universities have shut down outreach programs and cultural centers, eliminated centers that provided academic supports and scholarship opportunities, terminated important staff and faculty positions, and ended cultural celebrations, such as graduation ceremonies for Black, Latino, and LGBTQ+ students. In some cases, university administrators have even eliminated positions and programming outside the requirements of the law, fearing that a mistake or oversight will result in a loss of important school funding (Rodrigues, 2024).

As a recent graduate of the University of Texas at Austin, I have seen firsthand how implementation of SB 17 has hurt my fellow classmates and the campus community. In April, UT announced it would close the Division of Campus and Community Engagement to comply with SB 17. This university initiative was dedicated to integrating access and belonging into the university's core mission and supporting students who struggle the most to access education. The DCCE connected students to mentors, tutoring opportunities, community and on-campus resources, and leadership opportunities. While these services were available to all students, the DCCE specifically focused its support on historically underserved populations, who most needed assistance.

Make no mistake: Students across Texas are less prepared to succeed in school and beyond without the resources and programs like the ones available through diversity, equity and inclusion offices, like UT's

Texas Legislative Education Equity Coalition

Division of Campus and Community Engagement.

Recommendations

As a result of SB 17, college campuses have become dominated by a culture of fear and mistrust, leaving students and staff disconnected from the campus supports on which they previously relied. We urge the subcommittee to:

- Repeal SB 17 and appropriate state funding to support institutions of higher education to reinstate offices of diversity, equity and inclusion and corresponding student centers and services;
- Clarify the exempted activities outlined in SB 17 to institutions and require them to add that clarity in their institutional guidance to protect against the overreach of compliance with SB 17 as passed; and
- Invest in university support services that emphasize equity and college access for all Texas students.

Students deserve access to safe, equitable college and university campuses. This is critical to their academic success, college outcomes and campus experiences. Thank you for your consideration.

For questions, contact TLEEC coordinators, Dr. Chloe Latham Sikes at IDRA (chloe.sikes@idra.org) or Jaime Puente at Every Texan (puente@everytexan.org).

Citations

Kepner, L. (January 29, 2024). What UT Lost with SB 17: American-Statesman's Guide to Changes Due to Texas' Anti-DEI Law. Austin American-Statesman. <https://www.statesman.com/story/news/politics/state/2024/01/29/dei-ban-texas-sb17-law-meaning-guide-what-ut-public-universities-lost/72283717007/>

Rodrigues, M. (Feb. 27, 2024). How Texas' DEI Ban Swallowed a UT Program for UT Students. Dallas Morning News. <https://www.dallasnews.com/news/education/2024/02/27/how-texas-dei-ban-swallowed-a-ut-program-for-undocumented-students/>

The Texas Legislative Education Equity Coalition (TLEEC) is a collaborative of organizations and individuals with the mission to improve the quality of public education for all children, with a focus on racial equity. The coalition convenes organizations and individuals who advocate in the interest of public school students at the local, state and national levels.

TLEEC Member and Additional Signatory Organizations

ARISE Adelante	Mexican American School Boards Association (MASBA)
Asian Texans for Justice	National Association for Chicana and Chicano Studies (NACCS)
Austin Justice Coalition	– Tejas Foco
Big Thought	San Antonio Hispanic Chamber of Commerce
Black Brown Policy Dialogues	SEAT (Students Engaged in Advancing Texas)
Black Parents and Families Collective	Southwest Region Youth Legislative Action Center
Breakthrough Central Texas	Texas American Federation of Teachers
Children at Risk	Texas Association for Bilingual Education (TABE)
Coalition of Texans with Disabilities (CTD)	Texas Association for Chicanos in Higher Education (TACHE)
Culturingua	Texas Association of Diversity Officers in Higher Education (TADOHE)
Dr. Hector P. García G.I. Forum	Texas Association of Mexican American Chambers of Commerce (TAMACC)
Easterseals Central Texas	Texas Faculty Association
Educators in Solidarity	Texas Hispanics Organized for Political Education (HOPE)
Ethnic Studies Network of Texas (ESNTX)	Texas League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC)
Every Texan	Texas NAACP
Houston Community Voices for Public Education	Texas State Teachers Association (TSTA)
IDRA	The Arc of Texas
Measure	UnidosUS (formerly known as NCLR)
McNeil Educational Foundation for Ecumenical Leadership	
Mexican American Civil Rights Institute (MACRI)	
Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund (MALDEF)	

Texas Legislative Education Equity Coalition