



Written Testimony to Senate Committee on the Implementation of SB 17

Dr. Kimberly Clarida, Higher Education Senior Policy Analyst, Every Texan

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Every Texan is an independent public policy organization that uses data and analysis to advocate for solutions that enable Texans of all backgrounds to reach their full potential. We believe in all Texans having access to high-quality and affordable education that aids in their social and economic well-being.

Every Texan submitted written testimony against Senate Bill 17 during the last legislative session because we understand that SB 17 is a significant step backward for our higher education institutions. Students, faculty, and staff should feel safe and included and have the resources and support they need to thrive academically and professionally. Diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives attempt to remedy centuries of discrimination in higher education while boosting access and success for all students, faculty, and staff. These efforts are a commitment to recruiting and supporting students and faculty who have been systematically denied access to college degrees and academic careers.

Now, less than six months into SB 17's enforcement, we are already seeing its negative implications. Due to the closure of UT Austin's Division of Campus and Community Engagement (DCCE), recent graduates like myself had to rely on external organizations and pay out-of-pocket expenses to participate in cultural graduation celebrations. Prior to SB 17, Black, Latinx, and LGBTQ+ students were able to participate in mentorship programs, professional development, and cultural celebrations in safe spaces like the DCCE to mitigate the systemic challenges that they face daily. Now, the closure of these centers across Texas has removed inclusive programs and eliminated opportunities and traditions for students that allowed them to build community on their campuses and celebrate cultural and historical achievements.

Since the passing and implementation of SB 17, Black and Brown staff and faculty have been the victim of mass firings to "show compliance," despite these individuals' willingness to comply, flexibility, and highly transferable skill sets that made them eligible for other roles at their institution.

Similar to other organizations that advocate for the need for diversity, equity, and inclusion in higher education practices to ensure the academic success of all students, Every Texan **recommends** the following actions:

- Reinstatement of diversity, equity, and inclusion offices that provide student centers and services (repeal SB 17).
- Clear guidelines that explicitly outline what is and is not covered under SB 17.
- Safeguards for mentorship programs and cultural activities.



- Job security for those who are no longer affiliated with diversity and equity programming. In other words, reassigned staff and faculty should *never* be the sole target of hiring cuts for responsibilities that they no longer conduct.

The Senate Subcommittee on Higher Education should heed our recommendations and take decisive action to repeal SB 17 and uphold the principles of diversity, equity, and inclusion in Texas higher education. Together, we can ensure that every Texan has the opportunity to reach their full potential, regardless of race, class, income, ability, or other differentiating characteristics.