



COMMISSION RECOMMENDATION

Human Rights Commission

Recommendation Number: 20240520-002: **Condemning the Impact of Senate Bill 17 on Higher Education and Advocating for Inclusive Educational Practices**

WHEREAS, the Human Rights Commission of the City of Austin acknowledges the critical role of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives in fostering a welcoming and supportive environment for all students and staff members at public universities; and

WHEREAS, Senate Bill 17 (SB 17), which mandates the closure of DEI offices and prohibits DEI programs and trainings at Texas public universities, has had a profound negative impact on the University of Texas at Austin (UT Austin) and other public institutions within the city; and

WHEREAS, the closure of DEI offices has resulted in the dissolution of programs such as the Multicultural Engagement Center, the Gender and Sexuality Center, and Monarch, which provided essential support to marginalized student groups and undocumented students; and

WHEREAS, UT Austin and other universities have been forced to lay off dozens of staff members, many of whom were previously dedicated to DEI-related work, thereby reducing the support available to students from diverse backgrounds; and

WHEREAS, the implementation of SB 17 has led to significant disruptions in the academic and social experiences of students, causing a sense of loss and alienation, as expressed by students at public protests; and

WHEREAS, the Commission recognizes the detrimental impact of SB 17 on the mental and emotional wellbeing of students and staff members, as well as on the academic reputation and competitiveness of UT Austin and other public universities; and

WHEREAS, Governor Greg Abbott has announced plans to implement further compliance measures to ensure the complete ban on DEI practices, which threatens to exacerbate the negative effects on higher education within the city; and

WHEREAS, the Commission believes that educational institutions serve as key anchors for the wellbeing and progress of the city and that attacks on higher education undermine the social and economic fabric of Austin;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION OF THE CITY OF AUSTIN:

1. The Commission strongly condemns the adverse effects of Senate Bill 17 on the wellbeing of students and staff members at UT Austin and other public universities within the city.
2. The Commission calls upon the administration of UT Austin and other affected institutions to seek all possible avenues to mitigate the negative impacts of SB 17 on their campuses, including exploring alternative sources of support for affected programs and staff members.
3. The Commission recommends the City Council to instruct the city's lobbyists to actively oppose any future legislation that threatens the integrity and inclusiveness of higher education within the state of Texas, particularly measures that seek to dismantle DEI initiatives and related programs.
4. The Commission reaffirms its commitment to promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion in all aspects of life within the City of Austin and urges the community to stand in solidarity with students and staff members affected by SB 17.
5. The Commission recommends the City Clerk to forward a copy of this resolution to the Governor of Texas, the Lieutenant Governor, Chair of the Texas Legislature Higher Education Committee, members of the Texas Legislature, the President of the University of Texas at Austin, and other relevant stakeholders.
6. The Commission calls on Council to support budget recommendation 20240325-06 titled Addressing the Ban on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Initiatives passed by this body at the March 25th, 2024 meeting.

Date of Approval: May 20, 2024

Record of the vote: The recommendation was approved on Vice Chair Zeidan's motion, Commissioner Kirsh Pozen's second on an 8-0 vote. Commissioners Raghavan, Weigel, and Stevenson were absent.

Attest: 

Eric Anderson, Staff Liaison, Office of the City Clerk