



August 16th, 2024

**OFFICIAL STATEMENT ON BEHALF OF SWBLSA  
RE: TEXAS - TERMINATION OF DEI PROGRAMMING**

The Southwest Region of the National Black Law Student Association (SWBLSA) is dedicated to promoting the educational, professional, and social needs of Black law students. As we enter into the 2024 - 2025 academic year, we express our continued disappointment with the implementation of Senate Bill 17 (SB 17) in the state of Texas. Since its implementation in January 2024, SB 17 has had profound implications for diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) across college and university campuses. Six hundred programs related to DEI have been eradicated and over 300 full-time and part-time positions have been eliminated by the Texas University system.<sup>1</sup> The ACLU of Texas stated “some of the language is so vague or broad that it’s impossible to confidently and consistently follow this law.”<sup>2</sup> The ambiguity in the language opens the door to potential violations of “First Amendment rights (freedom of speech and expression) for students and staff, and Fourteenth Amendment rights (equal protection) for people of color, women and/or LGBTQIA+ students and staff.”<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, the bill’s ban against DEI initiatives in higher education threaten the safety and well-being of college students and staff from marginalized communities by chilling their ability to speak or report on their lived experiences in a college setting.<sup>4</sup>

Over the summer, we have held strategy meetings with students from various Texas universities and law schools. These meetings included conversations aimed at equipping students with plans and talking points to effectively advocate for the continued support and resources for DEI initiatives as well as to provide Black law students with those points when engaging their Deans and other leaders. Studies and research, including an executive summary from the U.S. Department of Education, have consistently shown that gaps in college opportunities contribute to diminished social mobility.<sup>5</sup> Students of color and low-income students often face systemic barriers that affect their

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<sup>1</sup> Acacia Coronado, *Texas university leaders say hundreds of positions, programs cut to comply with DEI ban* (May 14, 2024), <https://apnews.com/article/diversity-ban-texas-colleges-dei-00cc7122d6a6f91eed0604d0a39e99f7>.

<sup>2</sup> *SB 17 Fact Sheet* (September 17, 2023), [https://www.aclutx.org/sites/default/files/sb\\_17\\_factsheet\\_twopager.pdf](https://www.aclutx.org/sites/default/files/sb_17_factsheet_twopager.pdf).

<sup>3</sup> *Id.*

<sup>4</sup> *Id.*

<sup>5</sup> *U.S. Department of Education, Office of Planning, Evaluation and Policy Development and Office of the United Secretary, Advancing Diversity and Inclusion in Higher Education* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of

access to quality education and hinder their chances of success in higher education.<sup>6</sup> Diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives have historically addressed disparities and created valuable experiences for underrepresented students.<sup>7</sup> DEI safeguards ensure institutions are “addressing educational disparities and preparing students for a future where fairness and inclusion in the workplace are vital.”<sup>8</sup>

The dismantling of these initiatives through SB 17 is a disservice to all students, particularly those from marginalized backgrounds. We call on the Texas Legislature and public university administrations to recognize and address the detrimental impacts of SB 17. We urge a recommitment to DEI-centered principles. Our demands remain the same as they did in 2023. We urge the Texas Legislature to repeal Texas Senate Bill 17 to preserve and strengthen DEI initiatives within public universities and colleges. We encourage all law schools within the state of Texas to:

- Create strong and clear policies that express a continued investment of resources and support to Black student organizations and other marginalized affinity groups.
- Allocate resources to support DEI efforts, including funding programs, training, and initiatives that promote understanding, respect, and equal opportunity for all students.
- Engage in constructive dialogue with all stakeholders, including student organizations and community leaders from diverse backgrounds, to develop policies and practices that promote a more inclusive educational environment.

SWBLSA is unwavering in its dedication to advancing social justice, equality, and inclusive educational access for all students. The attack on DEI is dangerous, and we urge its opponents to consider the damage that is coming. We will continue to collaborate with and advocate vigorously for our members and partners to foster change and ensure that our universities and colleges are supportive spaces where every individual can thrive.

In SWBLSA Service,

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SWBLSA Regional Chair

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Education, 2016) <https://www2.ed.gov/rschstat/research/pubs/advancing-diversity-inclusion.pdf>.

<sup>6</sup> *Id.* at 38-40.

<sup>7</sup> *Id.* at 2-3, 7-8.

<sup>8</sup> *Preparing Students for a Diverse World: Why DEI Matters on Campus*, (October 31, 2023), <https://www.peace.edu/preparing-students-for-a-diverse-world-why-dei-matters-on-campus/>.