

STUDENT SENATE BILL 2024-1234

TITLE: A Resolution Condemning the University of Florida's Decision to Terminate Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Offices and Employees

AUTHOR(S): Minority Party Leader Nathaniel Pelton, Senator Hunter Monson

SPONSOR(S): Senate President John Brinkman, Senate President Pro-Tempore Saketh Damera, Member-at-Large Maya Idiculla, Member-at-Large Laurel Wentworth, Majority Party Leader Julia Seifer, Deputy Minority Party Leader Anamika Naidu, Senator Arturo Zárrate, Senator Aaron Rubaii, VISA Vice President of Internal Affairs Hana Ali, Senator Zoe Richter

WHEREAS, on March 1, 2024, it was announced that the University of Florida would fire 13 full-time diversity, equity, and inclusion positions, end 15 administrative appointments for faculty Friday, and eliminate the office of the Chief Diversity Officer [1]; and,

WHEREAS, the University of Florida states that “inclusion is one of our six central values”, further saying that inclusion is a “connective tissue that unites all our core values” [2]; and,

WHEREAS, the Office of the Chief Diversity Officer, a team created to advise the University President on how to uphold and further integrate this central value, has been closed by the University; and,

WHEREAS, The University has left these employees with no guaranteed job and little guidance, except that they are “encouraged to apply before April 19 to other positions in the university” [3]; and,

WHEREAS, \$5 million in “DEI expenses, including salaries and expenditures” at the University of Florida have now been diverted towards a “faculty recruitment fund,” and it has not been disclosed how much money was state or federal funded, nor has it given any replacement strategy for future funding [1]; and,

WHEREAS, the University has given no mention regarding the Center of Inclusion and Multicultural Engagement (CIME), as to whether it will continue to be funded by the University or if it will even be allowed to stay open in its current form; and,

WHEREAS, CIME oversees the offices of engagement for “Asian, Black, Hispanic and LGBTQ+” students at the University of Florida and has been funded through the UF operating budget, with around 86% of those expenditures being state-funded [4]; and,

WHEREAS, the lack of information regarding CIME leaves students and organizations who utilize and depend on it in the dark, unknowing whether or not if they can continue to use it for professional or social means for the foreseeable future; and,

WHEREAS, the University has stated that these measures have been taken to comply with the Florida Board of Governors Regulation 9.016, stating in part that Universities and Organizations that rely on university funding may not “expend any state or federal funds” to “support, promote, or maintain” DEI initiatives or programs [5]; and,

WHEREAS, instead of working towards a comprehensive solution and finding alternate sources of funding for these important efforts, the University has instead chosen to go the easy route and pulled funding from or shut down positions relating to DEI initiatives and programs; and,

WHEREAS, other major Florida public universities, such as Florida State University and the University of Central Florida, either provide entire institutes based on DEI training to help students “gain knowledge about how to support fellow students with various identities to create a more united campus” or require elected student officials to attend diversity training sessions [6][7]; and,

WHEREAS, despite the purely unbased claims from the State of Florida that DEI is a divisive mechanism, the goal of making all people included does not exclude any other demographic, and the diversification of societal institutions only fosters further understanding of perspectives that have been historically underrepresented [8]; and,

WHEREAS, while the firing of DEI employees in this case pertains to academic & student wellbeing, other potential risks of healthcare inequity have been posed from the State of Florida already regarding the barriers of gender affirming care and disparities of proper treatment and diagnosis of individuals from marginalized groups in comparison to their white counterparts [9][10][11]; and,

WHEREAS, DEI initiatives aim to close the systemic gaps that have been institutionalized, and the presence of attacks against DEI demonstrate a regression of equity that has been continually fought for by countless individuals, organizations, social activist groups, etc. [12]; and,

WHEREAS, when students feel valued, supported, and included, they are more likely to thrive academically and socially, so DEI initiatives can help close achievement gaps and improve retention rates; and,

WHEREAS, DEI initiatives are instrumental in addressing systemic inequalities, promoting social justice, and fostering a sense of belonging for all students, faculty, and staff; and,

WHEREAS, academic success, personal growth, and overall well-being of students from diverse backgrounds are all important focuses for DEI initiatives, so the elimination of such essential positions demonstrates a potential risk for other possible encroachments regarding DEI within academia; and,

WHEREAS, the removal and/or reduction of DEI potentially exacerbates existing disparities and hinder efforts to create inclusive and equitable educational environments for University of Florida students; and,

WHEREAS, University of Florida executive and administrative leadership have been granted the immense responsibility to protect its students, promote a genuine understanding of the issues its students face, & preserve the institutions that help further the academic excellence and prestige of its students; then,

THEREFORE, LET IT BE RESOLVED that the University of Florida Student Senate affirms the importance of preserving and strengthening diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives in all educational institutions; and,

THEREFORE, LET IT FURTHER BE RESOLVED that the University of Florida Student Senate condemns any attempt to dismantle or undermine DEI initiatives and calls for the continued support in fighting against state encroachments upon DEI; and,

THEREFORE, LET IT FURTHER BE RESOLVED that the University of Florida Student Senate commits to supporting policies and funding initiatives that promote diversity, equity, and inclusion in educational institutions; and,

THEREFORE, LET IT FURTHER BE RESOLVED that the University of Florida Student Senate urges educational institutions to prioritize DEI initiatives as integral components of their missions and strategic plans in combating against systemic racism & institutional barriers; and,

THEREFORE, LET IT FURTHER BE RESOLVED that the University of Florida Student Senate recognizes that systemic barriers have emerged due to historical, social, economic, political, and cultural factors and addressing these barriers requires sustained efforts to dismantle discriminatory practices, promote equity, and create inclusive systems and institutions; and,

THEREFORE, LET IT FURTHER BE RESOLVED that the University of Florida Student Senate acknowledges how there has been no explicit direction or instruction given regarding the future of the Center of Inclusion and Multicultural Engagement, its employees, and students who utilize the space; and,

THEREFORE, LET IT FINALLY BE RESOLVED that the University of Florida Student Senate advocates for University of Florida executive and administrative leadership to stand against state attacks on DEI & condemns the decision to terminate DEI employees, faculty appointments, & Chief Diversity Office.

Proviso: A copy of this resolution shall be sent to the University of Florida President Ben Sasse, University of Florida Provost J. Scott Angle, Vice President for Student Life Heather White, University of Florida Student Body President Olivia Green, Interim Director of the Center for Inclusion and Multicultural Engagement Elle Collins, Program Director of Asian Pacific Islander Desi Student Engagement Flora Wang, Program Director of Black Student Engagement Satcha Sanon, Program Director of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer Student

Engagement Jamir Wright, Program Director of Hispanic-Latinx Student Engagement Nathalie Turenne, Board of Trustees Chair Mori Hosseini, & Director of Campus Engagement & Interim Assistant Vice President for Student Life James Tyger.
The authors and sponsors of this bill recognize Lucas Nadeau as a co-author to this Resolution.

[1] <https://administrativememo.ufl.edu/2024/03/compliance-with-bog-regulation-9-016-onprohibited-expenditures/>

[2] <https://www.ufl.edu/about/diversity/>

[3] <https://www.wcjb.com/2024/03/01/university-florida-terminates-all-dei-employeesaccordance-with-state-regulation/?outputType=amp>

[4] <https://www.alligator.org/article/2024/03/uf-eliminates-diversity-equity-and-inclusion-offices>

[5] <https://www.flbog.edu/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/Draft-Regulation-9.016.pdf>

[6] <https://sga.fsu.edu/dii.shtml>

[7] <https://studentgovernment.ucf.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/4/2023/05/Title-III.pdf>

[8] <https://www.egonzehnder.com/functions/diversity-equity-inclusion/insights/dei-isnt-divisiveits-unifying>

[9] <https://www.clinclerge.com/health-equity-and-dei-are-they-synonymous/>

[10] <https://www.hrc.org/press-releases/breaking-florida-senate-passes-extreme-genderaffirming-care-ban>

[11] <https://equalaccess.med.ufl.edu/for-volunteers/professional-students/eacn-officermanual/lgbt-clinic/>

[12] <https://www.diverseeducation.com/opinion/article/15636500/under-siege-attacks-on-deiand-its-implications-for-students>



Monish Vijayaraghavan
Senate President

3/21/24

Date