

Campus Climate Report

Perspectives on campus climate and the effects of SB 17's DEI ban from LGBTQIA+ students, staff, and faculty at Texas colleges and universities

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Table of Contents

Executive Summary	3
Background	4
Campus Climate	4
SB 17: The Texas DEI Ban.....	5
LGBTQIA+ Campus Climate Project	7
Participants and Institutions.....	7
Student Perspective	8
Staff and Faculty Perspective.....	9
Insights: Safety on Campus	10
Public Universities	10
Private Universities	10
Insights: Impact of SB 17 on Students.....	11
Public Universities	11
Private Universities.....	12
Insights: Impact of SB 17 on Staff and Faculty	13
Public Universities.....	13
Private Universities	14
Conclusion	15
Action Steps	16
Everyday Texans	16
Texas Legislators and University Administrators	17



Executive Summary

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) generally refers to initiatives that support marginalized people and coach others on ways to intentionally foster an inclusive environment for people of varying identities. Texas has a diverse population, with many different cultures and traditions. DEI programs foster mutual respect and appreciation. By fostering participation from diverse voices, these programs help to ensure that everyone feels valued and respected.

During the 88th Legislative Session, Texas lawmakers passed a bill that prevents public colleges and universities from having either an office or employee focused on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion. The bill, known as SB 17, also prevents universities from soliciting diversity statements from applicants and requiring DEI training for employees, with stiff penalties for any violations of the law. Effective since January 1st, 2024, faculty, staff, and students at Texas universities have already felt the impact of SB 17.

Equality Texas is tracking the ongoing effects of SB 17 through the LGBTQIA+ Campus Climate Report. In 2024, we spoke with 44 participants at 14 public colleges and 5 private colleges across Texas to learn about their perspectives on the LGBTQIA+ climate at their universities. These participants provide a mixed perspective, underscoring how SB 17 contributes to a hostile campus climate for LGBTQIA+ people by stripping away resources and creating an environment of fear. To create a positive climate for LGBTQIA+ people on college campuses and in Texas at large, it is important that institutions of higher education, representatives, and Texans foster LGBTQIA+ equality.

Background

Campus Climate

Campus Climate describes the perception held by students, staff, and faculty about the environment of a college campus. We measured the climate through interview questions that assess the degree to which students, staff, and faculty feel safe and valued on campus.¹ While partly influenced by individual interactions, campus climate is largely shaped by a college's policies, practices, and resources.² A positive campus climate is crucial for student success and faculty retention.

A student's likelihood of graduating is directly correlated with their sense of belonging. Studies across the United States and Canada show that the top reason students have seriously considered leaving their university is the lack of a sense of belonging; the second reason is the lack of support from their school.³

“ A student's likelihood of graduating is directly correlated with their *sense of belonging*.”

LGBTQIA+ students are less likely to report feeling a sense of belonging than their peers.⁴ Access to spaces focused on cultural engagement increases the likelihood that a student from a marginalized community will persist in their college education.⁵ These kinds of centers and resources are essential for LGBTQIA+ students, and especially so for those with multiple, intersecting identities. LGBTQIA+ people of color are more than twice as likely to report that unfair treatment at school is a barrier to their academic success.⁶

Given that college provides young people with an opportunity to explore their identity, many young queer people relocate to find the space to establish their own identity. LGBTQIA+ people of color (POC) are more than 3 times as likely to pick a college away from their family than their non-LGBTQIA+ POC peers.⁷ The distance from family and other pre-existing support structures underscores the importance of institutional support for marginalized students.

DEI gained mainstream popularity during the 2020 Black Lives Matter protests after the murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and Ahmaud Arbery.⁸ George Floyd's murder being televised and spread across social media started conversations about anti-blackness and discrimination at large. DEI has been seen as a way to combat discrimination by educating others on the history of marginalized groups and how to be allies to them, identifying policies and practices within an organization that result in unequal opportunities and dismantling them, and uplifting programs that center marginalized people.

1 "Assessing Climate," National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments,

<https://safesupportivelearning.ed.gov/training-technical-assistance/education-level/higher-education/assessment/assessing-climate>

2 Genevieve Weber, Sue Rankin, and Erik Malewski, "Do I Belong Here? Students' Service Experiences Through the Lens of Campus Climate," Inside Higher Ed, September 9, 2022, <https://www.insidehighered.com/views/2022/09/20/how-campus-climate-and-student-services-interactions-connect-opinion>.

3 Weber, Rankin, and Malewski, "Do I Belong Here?"

4 Weber, Rankin, and Malewski, "Do I Belong Here?"

5 Weber, Rankin, and Malewski, "Do I Belong Here?"

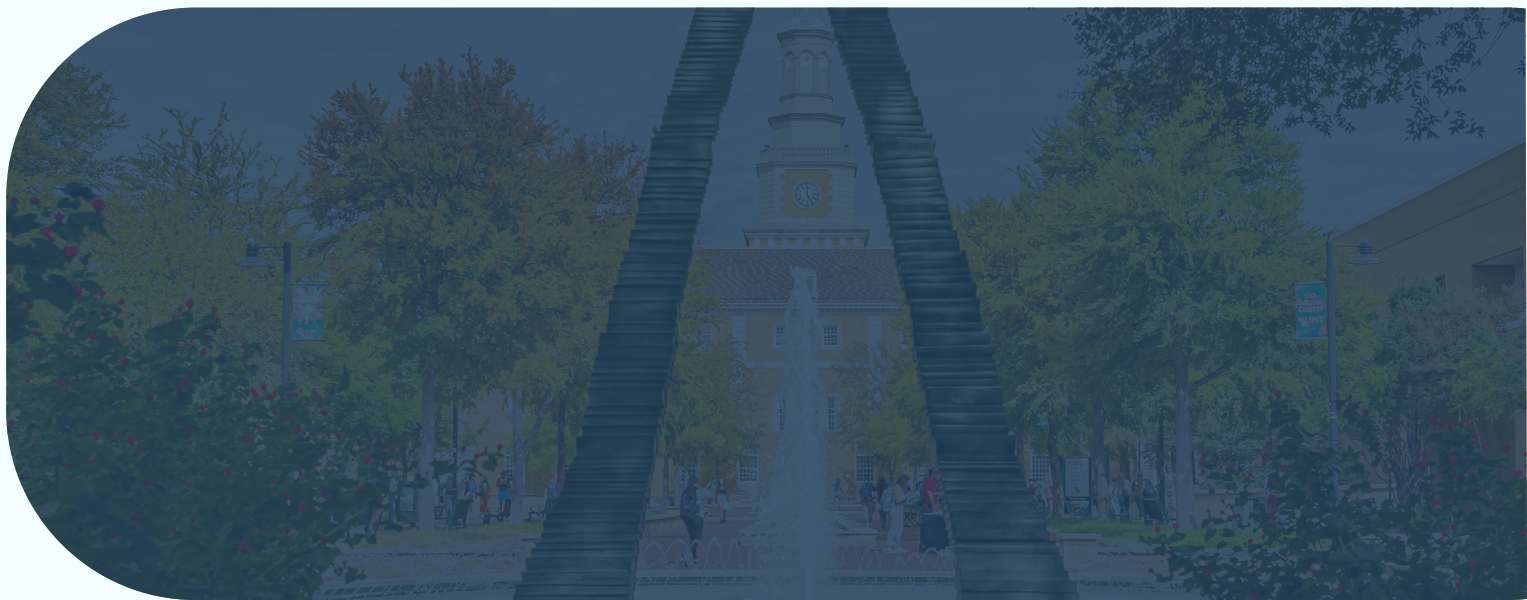
6 Kerith J. Conron, Kathryn K. O'Neill, Mariella Arredondo, Ruben Guardado, "Educational Experiences of LGBTQ People of Color," UCLA School of Law Williams Institute, February 2023, <https://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/publications/higher-ed-people-of-color>.

7 Conron, O'Neill, Arredondo, and Guardado. "Educational Experiences of LGBTQ People of Color."

8 Leah Watson, "Anti-DEI Efforts Are the Latest Attack on Racial Equity and Free Speech," American Civil Liberties Union, February 14, 2024, <https://www.aclu.org/news/free-speech/anti-dei-efforts-are-the-latest-attack-on-racial-equity-and-free-speech>.

In higher education, colleges and universities frequently hire DEI experts to help develop more inclusive practices and increase the diversity of staff, faculty, and students.⁹ Anti-DEI advocates view the practice as exclusionary to people who are not a part of marginalized groups. This claim is unsupported by the evidence. In 2020, President Trump even issued an Executive Order, banning federal funds from being used to promote so-called “divisive concepts,” such as implicit bias.¹⁰ Individual states have since used Trump’s Executive Order as a template for state-level DEI bans. After returning to office in 2025, Trump issued several executive orders terminating equity-related grants and forbidding the federal government and federally-funded entities from engaging in or promoting DEI and from recognizing the existence of transgender people.¹¹

In 2023, there were at least 65 state and national-level bills introduced banning DEI in higher education.¹² These bans stretch the definition of DEI far beyond programs that bear the name to include multicultural centers, like LGBTQIA+ centers, that existed long before the conversations around DEI became mainstream in 2020.



SB 17: The Texas DEI Ban

The Texas DEI ban (SB 17) has been in effect since January 2024. The law bans public colleges and universities from having DEI offices, holding mandatory DEI trainings, releasing DEI public statements, and soliciting DEI essays as part of applications.¹³ The law does not impact student groups, classroom instruction, inviting guest speakers, research, grant applications, and abiding by federal law.¹⁴ Colleges and universities who are not compliant with SB 17 will lose state funding.¹⁵

9 Leah Watson, “Anti-DEI Efforts Are the Latest Attack on Racial Equity and Free Speech,” American Civil Liberties Union, February 14, 2024, <https://www.aclu.org/news/free-speech/anti-dei-efforts-are-the-latest-attack-on-racial-equity-and-free-speech>.

10 The White House, “Executive Order on Combating Race and Sex Stereotyping,” September 20, 2022, <https://trumpwhitehouse.archives.gov/presidential-actions/executive-order-combating-race-sex-stereotyping>.

11 The White House, “Ending Radical and Wasteful Government DEI Programs and Preferencing,” January 20, 2025, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/01/ending-radical-and-wasteful-government-dei-programs-and-preferencing>.

12 Watson, “Anti-DEI Efforts Are the Latest Attack.”

13 88th Texas Legislature, SB 17, 2023, <https://capitol.texas.gov/tlodocs/88R/billtext/pdf/SB00017F.pdf#navpanes=0>.

14 88th Texas Legislature, SB 17.

15 88th Texas Legislature, SB 17.

The reaction to SB 17 has varied across time. When colleges initially shut down their DEI offices, staff was reassigned to other roles on campus.

Anti-DEI advocates accused universities of ignoring the law and conducting DEI under a different name. One conservative news site interviewed staff across different Texas universities using a hidden camera about how they were implementing SB 17.¹⁶ The video depicted staffers stating that they are trying to find creative ways to still serve marginalized communities while attempting to be compliant with SB 17.¹⁷ The video caught the eye of the law's author, Senator Creighton. In a letter dated March 26, 2024, Senator Creighton addressed all public universities:¹⁸

“While I am encouraged with the progress I have seen from many institutions of higher education in implementing SB 17, I am deeply concerned with the possibility that many institutions may choose to merely rename their offices or employee titles. This letter should serve as notice that this practice is unacceptable.”

Furthermore, Senator Creighton highlighted that the university systems should be prepared to explain what they have done to be compliant with SB 17 in a committee hearing upcoming in May. After receiving the letter, universities issued mass layoffs. The University of Texas at Austin laid off over 40 employees and the University of Texas at Dallas laid off 20.¹⁹

Students, staff, and faculty have spoken out against SB 17 in various ways. Students at Texas A&M University walked out of class chanting **“DEI till we die.”**²⁰ Students, faculty, and staff at the University of Texas at Austin held a virtual protest in a meeting with the university president, using **“No DEI=Not Our Texas”** as their virtual background.²¹

Private universities have also taken actions against SB 17. The student group Rice PRIDE at Rice University has offered membership to students from public colleges in Houston.²²

In the committee hearing on SB 17 compliance in May 2024, 69 people showed up to testify against SB 17, and 197 people dropped cards opposing this bill.²³

16 Marcela Rodrigues, “Hidden cameras aim to expose DEI efforts in Texas colleges despite ban,” The Dallas Morning News, February 15, 2024, <https://www.dallasnews.com/news/education/2024/02/15/hidden-cameras-aim-to-expose-dei-efforts-in-texas-colleges-despite-ban>.

17 Rodrigues, “Hidden cameras aim to expose DEI”.

18 Brandon Creighton, March 6, 2024, <https://senate.texas.gov/members/d04/press/en/a20240326a.pdf>.

19 Sneha Dey, “Layoffs and upheaval at Texas universities spur fear as lawmakers continue DEI crackdown,” The Texas Tribune, April 19, 2024, <https://www.texastribune.org/2024/04/19/texas-colleges-dei-ban>

20 Dey, “Layoffs and upheaval.”

21 Dey, “Layoffs and upheaval.”

22 Adam Zuvanich, “Rice University’s Pride organization offers membership, resources to LGBTQ+ students impacted by Senate Bill 17,” Houston Public Media, August 29, 2023, <https://www.houstonpublicmedia.org/articles/lgbtq/2023/08/29/460897/rice-universitys-pride-organization-offers-membership-resources-to-lgbtq-students-impacted-by-senate-bill-17>.

23 “Senate Subcommittee on Higher Education,” The Texas Senate Streaming Video Player, https://tlcsenate.granicus.com/MediaPlayer.php?clip_id=18500.

LGBTQIA+ Campus Climate Project

To understand the scope and depth of impact that SB 17 has on students, faculty, and staff across the state, Equality Texas launched the Campus Climate Project in 2024. We went to colleges—both public and private—across Texas and spoke with LGBTQIA+ students, staff members, and faculty members. This report offers a summary of our conversations with the participants.

Participants and Institutions

We spoke with 44 LGBTQIA+ participants at Texas colleges and universities. Of those, 23 were students, 14 were staff members, and 7 were faculty members.



We spoke with participants at 19 colleges across Texas, including 14 public colleges and 5 private. Of the 14 public institutions, 8 (including one community college) are in major cities, and 6 are located in small towns.



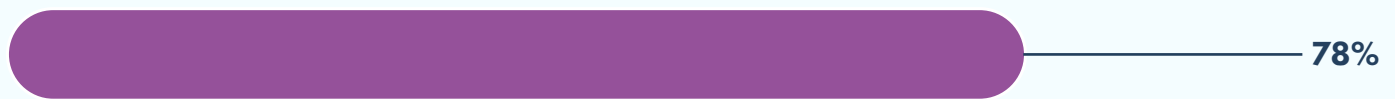
We also asked participants to share their racial demographics with us. Participants in the Campus Climate Project were majority white (73%), 9% Latine, 7% Black, 7% Asian/Pacific Islander, and 4% mixed race.



Student Perspective

We asked the student participants about their experiences on campus as LGBTQIA+ people and following the enactment of SB 17. Specifically, we asked whether they have experienced discrimination on their campus, whether they have experienced hostility for being LGBTQIA+ on campus, and whether they have been negatively impacted by the effects of SB 17, and whether they have considered leaving Texas or their college/university due to hostility in Texas and/or on campus.

Nearly 80% of student participants shared that they have considered leaving the state, and more than half shared that they have considered leaving their college or university. Nearly half said they have experienced discrimination on campus, and 70% said they have experienced hostility related to their LGBTQIA+ identity on campus. Finally, 65% said they have been negatively impacted by SB 17.



Have considered leaving Texas



Have considered leaving their college/university



Have experienced discrimination on campus



Have experienced LGBTQIA+ hostility on campus

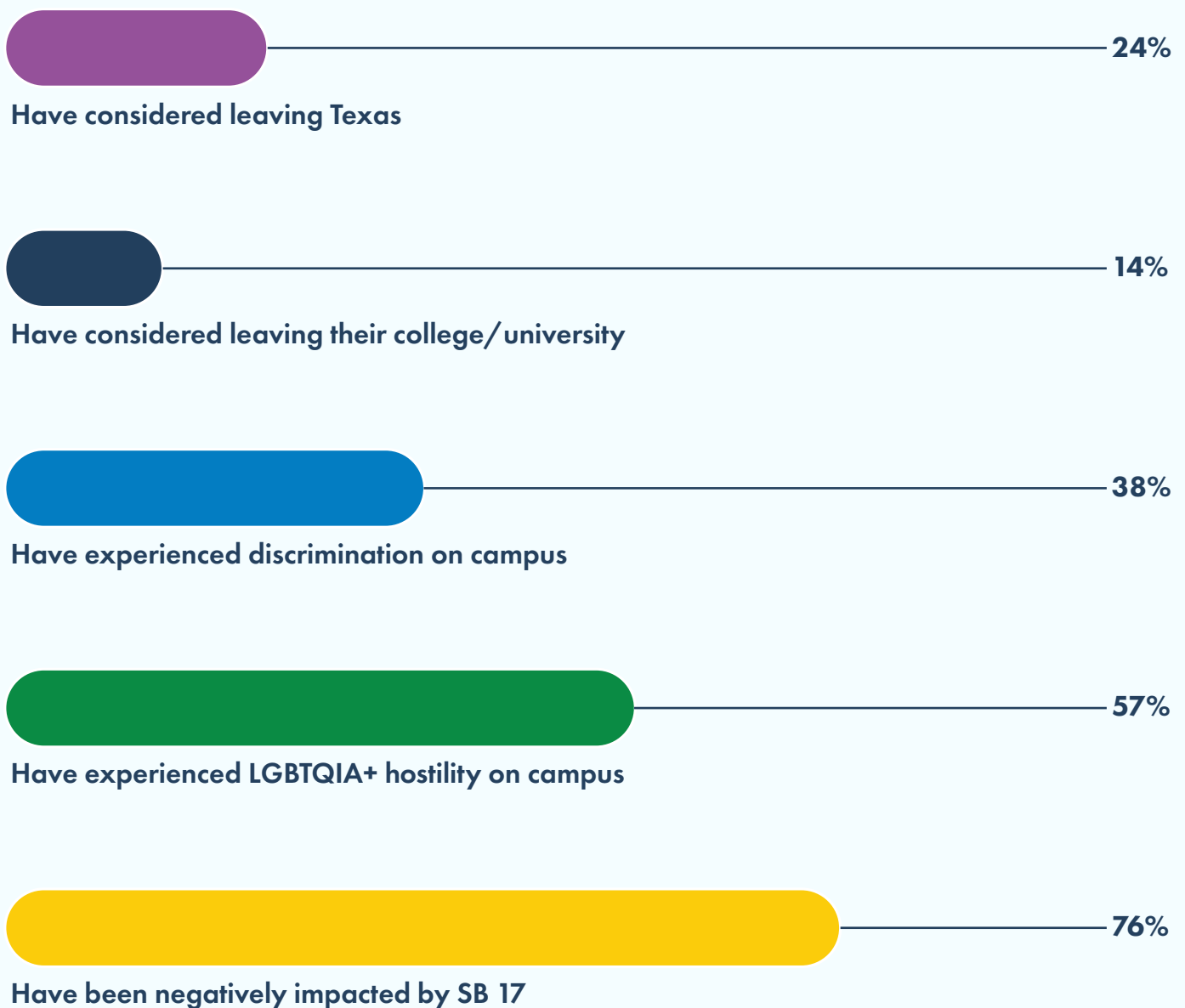


Have been negatively impacted by SB 17

Staff and Faculty Perspective

Similarly, we asked the staff and faculty participants about their experiences as LGBTQIA+ people and working and teaching on campus following the enactment of SB 17. We asked whether they have experienced discrimination on their campus, whether they have experienced hostility for being LGBTQIA+ on campus, and whether they have been negatively impacted by the effects of SB 17, and whether they have considered leaving Texas or their college/university due to hostility in Texas and/or on campus.

While staff and faculty were less likely than their student counterparts to consider leaving the state or their institution, many still reported experiencing discrimination or hostility on campus. More than three quarters of staff and faculty said that they have been negatively impacted by SB 17—higher than the percentage of students who said they have been negatively impacted by SB 17.



Insights: Safety on Campus

Public Universities

Students who report feeling safe on campus emphasize that it is primarily due to some aspect of their identity, including being white or straight-passing. Some students report feeling safe only because they are not fully out on campus.

Conversely, some students feel less safe due to other marginalized identities they hold. Students of color highlight experiences of racial discrimination, and trans students commonly report feeling unsafe on campus. Students we spoke to shared examples of people on their campuses suggesting that they couldn't be in the women's restroom, asking hostile questions about their gender identity, and using slurs towards them.

“ It’s not fair how my freedom and safety are determined by people who haven’t met people like me. — Student of Color at Public University

Similarly, staff and faculty members who report feeling safe on campus attribute this to being white, cisgender, cis-passing, or in positions of power, whereas people of color and trans people frequently report feeling unsafe. Trans and gender-diverse staff and faculty members recall instances of their colleagues consistently misgendering them and making transphobic remarks. Some faculty and staff members say that their sense of safety comes at the expense of censoring themselves and not using their pronouns freely.

Responses about safety were consistent across participants at public universities, regardless of whether they attended or worked at a university in a major city or small town.

Private Universities

Some students we spoke to at private universities said that they generally feel safe on campus, but still report instances of harmful conversations about trans people and anti-LGBTQIA+ demonstrations. Other students do not feel safe or have felt unsafe in the past, sharing instances of harassment from fellow students and anti-LGBTQIA+ hostility on social media.

Most faculty and staff we spoke to at private universities report feeling safe on campus, with some crediting this to their race, gender, able-bodiedness, and connections to peers. Other faculty and staff report feeling safe because they are cis- and straight-passing.

Despite faculty and staff at private universities feeling overwhelmingly safe on campus, they do report incidents that have made some LGBTQIA+ students feel unsafe on campus, including staff making transphobic remarks and students leading demonstrations against the university honoring LGBTQIA+ history.

While private universities are not subject to laws like SB 17, they also have the freedom to enact their own hostile or unfriendly policies. Two of the private universities we looked into have policies opposing same-sex relationships. A student at one of these universities says she does not have much LGBTQIA+ community and that she is not out on campus due to safety concerns. Likewise, a faculty member shares that she fears someone discovering that she is LGBTQIA+ and losing her job as a consequence.

Insights: Impact of SB 17 on Students

Public Universities

With faculty and staff no longer able to lead DEI programming because of SB 17, multiple students report having to take on extra responsibilities. Students say that the LGBTQIA+ student organizations they are a part of must now take on different programming events such as Trans Day of Visibility and National Coming Out Day—events that would have previously been hosted, at least in part, by their university.

On top of extra responsibilities, students report having important resources stripped away. They say that the DEI offices and LGBTQIA+ centers on campus previously offered free clothing for those transitioning, rented out professional clothes for job interviews, hosted Lavender Graduation (a ceremony celebrating LGBTQIA+ students and their accomplishments), offered support navigating the campus health center for students seeking gender-affirming care services, offered LGBTQIA+ books for students to check out, and overall provided a safe space for students.

“ Student organization work now feels like a job rather than an extracurricular, and we are not getting *properly compensated* for our work. — Student of Color at Public University

Other students report that SB 17 has made it difficult for LGBTQIA+ student organizations or advocacy groups to function. They say that their universities have made it difficult to implement new initiatives aimed at supporting LGBTQIA+ students or establish new LGBTQIA+ student organizations to host programming previously overseen by the university.

“ I didn’t understand the impacts of SB 17 until we lost resources and had to beg for our *place to belong*. — Student at Public University

Some students report that SB 17 has encouraged anti-LGBTQIA+ hate. They say that they have noticed an increase in anti-LGBTQIA+ hate, both on campus-centric social media and at in-person events for LGBTQIA+ student organizations.

Most students we spoke to at public universities have considered leaving Texas or their universities. For students who consider leaving their university, they cite their campus’s hostile climate towards LGBTQIA+ people as a reason. Students who have considered leaving Texas cite the state’s anti-LGBTQIA+ legislation, lack of diversity in their college towns, and dwindling rights.

“ If politicians are going to take away funding for all of DEI, that’s making a big statement that marginalized people *aren’t welcome*. — Student at Public University

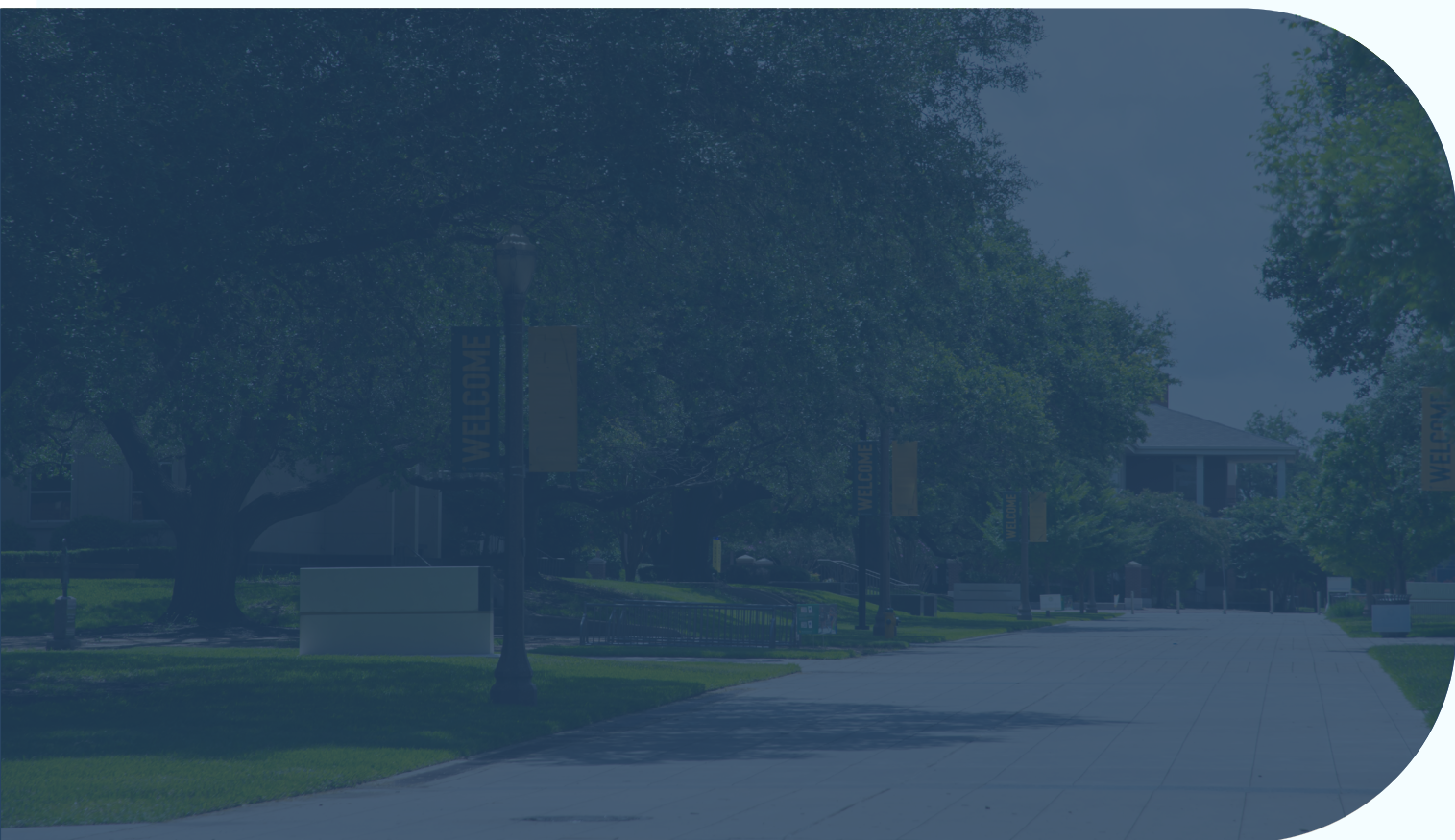
Private Universities

Because SB 17 does not apply to private universities, most students do not report being directly impacted. None of the students report having a formal DEI office dedicated to LGBTQIA+ issues run by staff. LGBTQIA+ initiatives at these universities are instead led by students. They emphasize that this can be overwhelming at times as they lack the administrative support for an LGBTQIA+ center that many out-of-state institutions have.

“ I feel like I shouldn't have to advocate so much just... **to be seen.**
— Student of Color at Private University

Some other students have little to no LGBTQIA+ resources at their private university. They say that there is not much available beyond a few LGBTQIA+ counselors, and students from one university say that it was only a year ago that administration recognized an LGBTQIA+ student group as an officially registered student organization.

While they may not be directly impacted by SB 17, all the students we spoke to at private institutions have considered leaving their institution or Texas because of the hostile climate towards LGBTQIA+ people. Some have already begun submitting transfer applications to schools outside of Texas, while others are considering leaving Texas after graduating.



Insights: Impact of SB 17 on Staff and Faculty

Public Universities

All faculty and staff report being impacted by SB 17 in some way, with many saying that the bill has created a culture of fear and confusion. They say that their universities are still trying to determine what is sanctioned by the bill and what is banned. They emphasize that this also leads faculty and staff to worry about job security.

“ It is hard to do work under *the threat of losing your job* put forth by the state.
— Staff of Color at Public University

Staff and faculty also emphasize that SB 17 has led to students losing out on crucial resources. Staff members say that trans students no longer know where to go on campus for resources like name changes. Other staff report that there are many parents who are angry that their students will not have access to the resources they were promised.

Multiple staff and faculty report a variety of resources that students are losing as a result of SB 17. They say that students no longer have access to educational events, Lavender Graduation, gender clothing swaps, gender-inclusive restrooms, free healthcare products, support for LGBTQIA+ student organizations, or crisis funds intended to support LGBTQIA+ students who have been disowned by their families.

Staff members say that SB 17 has hindered their ability to connect with students. Staff also say that there is no longer visual representation of allyship for LGBTQIA+ students, such as public displays of pride flags, and that this has created a lingering resentment students have towards staff due to their connection to the institution.

“ When SB17 changed things, it made people feel like they’re being pushed back *into a closet and ashamed*.
— Staff of Color at Public University

Some faculty and staff also report losing resources that support them as LGBTQIA+ people themselves, including funding for LGBTQIA+ employee resource groups. Faculty and staff also say that administration’s attitude around LGBTQIA+ issues have changed over time, with universities becoming less publicly supportive of LGBTQIA+ issues following the enactment of SB 17.

All faculty and staff we spoke to at public universities in major cities have considered leaving Texas or their institution. In fact, one staff member left their university during the duration of the LGBTQIA+ Campus Climate Project. Two staff members are finishing up their last year at their institution due to being laid off. Regardless of their considerations of leaving their respective institutions or Texas, faculty and staff emphasize the importance of staying and supporting students.

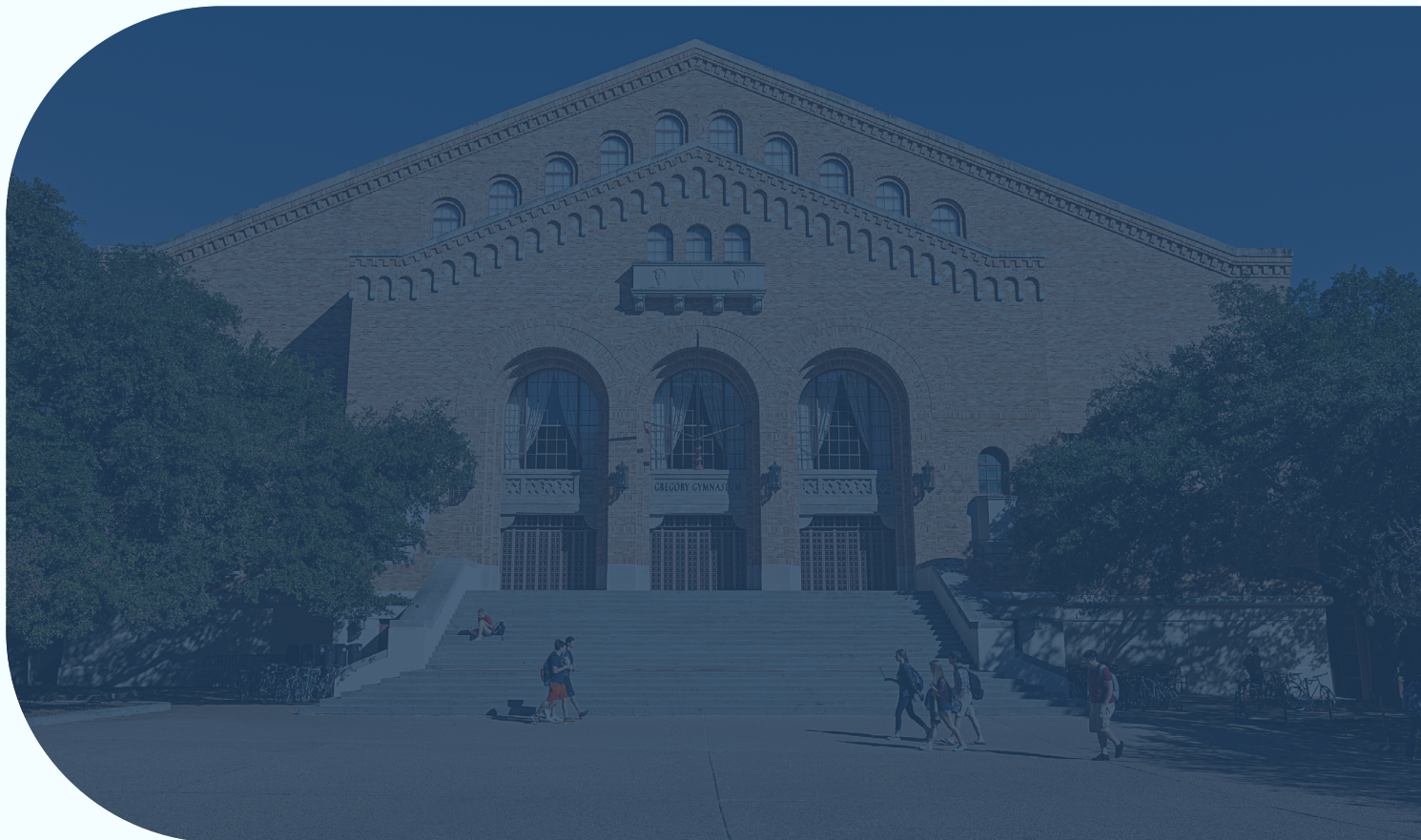
“ If everyone who has the power to do something leaves, what happens to those who *can’t leave*?
— Staff at Public University

Private Universities

Since SB 17 does not apply to private universities, most faculty and staff we spoke to do not report being directly impacted by SB 17. Faculty and staff at these institutions are allowed to continue to provide LGBTQIA+ resources to students. Some staff say that they are still able to provide LGBTQIA+ resources to students such as conferences with LGBTQIA+ speakers, ally training, Lavender Graduation, free reproductive health products, and a space for LGBTQIA+ students to lounge and find community. Others highlight that while they may not work in a formal DEI office, they are still able to provide support to LGBTQIA+ students through mentoring and shared experience. Some faculty and staff detail ways they have been able to advocate for LGBTQIA+ inclusive policies, like gender-inclusive housing and bathrooms.

Though not directly impacted by SB 17, faculty and staff at private universities say that the bill has affected the way they engage with neighboring public institutions. Staff say that they work with public universities in case LGBTQIA+ students there want to transfer, and some private institutions offer LGBTQIA+ resources to students from neighboring public institutions.

Furthermore, faculty and staff do emphasize that SB 17 influences how they engage with LGBTQIA+ students at their private universities. They say that they are talking with students more about anti-LGBTQIA+ legislation in Texas and preparing LGBTQIA+ students for life after college in the wake of this legislation. Some staff and faculty have already seen their colleagues and students leave Texas as a result of anti-LGBTQIA+ legislation. Some also say that SB 17 has impacted policies and practices at their institution. Though not required by law, they have seen DEI programs be renamed as higher-level university administrators now see DEI as a “political term they don’t need.”



Conclusion

LGBTQIA+ students, faculty, and staff at universities across Texas are facing hostility and a dearth of resources on campus. Many students, staff, and faculty members report feeling unsafe on campus, and those that do feel generally safe quickly point to individual protections or privileges as a reason: being white, straight- or cis-passing, or sitting in positions of power on campus. SB 17 has quickly stripped LGBTQIA+ students at public universities of resources and support systems, while students at private universities say that they have long needed more resources. Between hostile campus climates and anti-DEI legislation like SB 17, many of Texas's LGBTQIA+ students, faculty, and staff are likely to leave Texas in the coming months and years.

Representation, inclusive policies, and student support are key factors for fostering belonging, especially among marginalized students on campus.²⁴ Anti-DEI bills make implementing these practices impossible. As a result of anti-DEI legislation, nearly half of LGBTQIA+ faculty members working in states affected by DEI bans have considered moving to another state, and more than a third have considered leaving academia.²⁵

Anti-DEI policies damage the sense of belonging among LGBTQIA+ students. Without affirming educational spaces, LGBTQIA+ students are more likely to suffer academically and emotionally. LGBTQIA+ students who experience discrimination are more likely to become disengaged and have lower GPAs.²⁶ Nationally, one in three LGBTQIA+ students report considering suicide.²⁷ These numbers are even higher for LGBTQIA+ students of color (35%), as well as transgender and gender expansive students (39%).²⁸

DEI is not only important for LGBTQIA+ students; it is important for all students. Learning about diverse communities teaches students how to interact with others who are different from them in schools and the workforce. Being able to work with people from diverse backgrounds is important to an overwhelming majority (96%) of major employers.²⁹ And being able to work in diverse environments leads to better decision making and problem solving skills.³⁰

The enactment of SB 17 is a loss for Texas students and universities across the state. As the anti-DEI conversation escalates at the local, state, and national level, it is essential that Texans fight back against legislation like this and continue to advocate for policies and programs that support Texas's marginalized communities.

24 Mary Murphy and Mesmin Destin, "Promoting Inclusion and Identity Safety to Support College Success," The Century Foundation, May 18, 2016, <https://tcf.org/content/report/promoting-inclusion-identity-safety-support-college-success>.

25 Abbie E. Goldberg, "The Impact of Anti-DEI Legislation on LGBTQ+ Faculty in Higher Education," UCLA College of Law Williams Institute, May 2024, <https://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/publications/anti-dei-laws-higher-ed>.

26 Kathryn K. O'Neill, Kerith J. Conron, Abbie E. Goldberg, and Ruben Guardado, "Experiences of LGBTQ People in Four-Year Colleges and Graduate Programs," UCLA College of Law Williams Institute, May 2022, <https://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/wp-content/uploads/LGBTQ-College-Grad-School-May-2022.pdf>.

27 "Research Brief: Suicide Risk and Access to Care Among LGBTQ College Students," The Trevor Project, September 2022, <https://www.thetrevorproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/September-Research-Brief-September-Research-Brief.pdf>.

28 "Research Brief: Suicide Risk and Access to Care."

29 "The Benefits of Inclusion and Diversity in the Classroom," American University School of Education, July 24, 2019, <https://soeonline.american.edu/blog/benefits-of-inclusion-and-diversity-in-the-classroom>.

30 Katherine W. Phillips, "How Diversity Makes Us Smarter," Scientific American, October 1, 2014, <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/how-diversity-makes-us-smarter>.

Action Steps

There are many ways that Texans can help foster a more positive campus climate for LGBTQIA+ people. Below are action steps for both everyday Texans and people in positions of power—including at the Texas legislature and institutions of higher education—to support LGBTQIA+ people on college campuses.

Follow Equality Texas for continued updates on how to advocate for equality, fight bills like SB 17, and support LGBTQIA+ Texans.

Everyday Texans

- **Combat Misinformation**

Much of today's political discourse around DEI asserts that DEI offices or programs were created to be exclusionary; however, DEI offices at the campus level were created to be inclusive spaces for marginalized people and provide resources to help students thrive in their academic careers. As the debate around DEI escalates and misinformation ramps up, it is important that Texans do what they can to combat misinformation and share why DEI offices and programming on our college campuses matter.

- **Advocate for Research and Academic Freedom**

Research and academic freedom are important. This freedom is critical to continuing research on how to best support LGBTQIA+ people—without fear of being silenced. As hostility toward LGBTQIA+ people increases across the state and country, it is essential that students and faculty can study LGBTQIA+ history and protections. We still don't understand all the connections between intersecting challenges that face LGBTQIA+ Texans, and academic freedom enables students and professors to identify the root causes of challenges faced by the community and experiment with innovative solutions.

- **Vote in State and Local Elections**

While federal elections are incredibly important, it is crucial that Texans vote in their state and local elections. The representatives chosen in state and local elections control policy that directly impacts Texas—like SB 17. Despite the importance of these elections, voter turnout for state and local elections is significantly lower than for presidential elections, due in part to rampant voter suppression.

- **Combat Voter Suppression**

In addition to gerrymandering and voter ID laws enforced by the Texas legislature, studies show that LGBTQIA+ people face barriers when voting. LGBTQIA+ people, especially people of color and trans people, report being dropped from the voting rolls, being intimidated or denied the right to vote due to their gender identity, and having issues getting the correct voter ID. Nationally, over 40% of trans people of color were turned away at the voting booth during the 2020 election. To combat voter suppression, Texans can become voter registrars to register others, sign up to become elections officials, and let others know that they should always request a provisional ballot if they are told they're unable to vote.

- » **ACLU election protection hotline:** 1-866-OUR-VOTE
- » **Upcoming elections, polling locations, and more:** <https://www.votetexas.gov>

Texas Legislators and University Administrators

- **Support Research and Academic Freedom**

While SB 17 has undoubtedly created a culture of fear at higher education institutions, administrators must commit to research and academic freedom on their campuses. There are nearly two million LGBTQIA+ people living in Texas. We still don't understand all the connections between intersecting challenges that face LGBTQIA+ Texans, and academic freedom enables students and professors to identify the root causes of challenges faced by the community and explore solutions. This freedom bolsters the work of lawmakers by offering innovative approaches to public policy challenges.

- **Support LGBTQIA+ Centers and Student Organizations**

This report underscores the importance of LGBTQIA+ centers and student organizations for students and campuses at large. These centers and organizations offer a safe space for marginalized students, foster community building, and offer essential resources across campus. While SB 17 may prevent public universities from overseeing a LGBTQIA+ center, it is important that they support student organizations as best they can. Private universities who are not subject to SB 17 should invest in and support LGBTQIA+ centers and student organizations.

- **Foster LGBTQIA+ Visibility and Representation**

A positive campus climate for LGBTQIA+ people must also include LGBTQIA+ representation and visibility. It is important for LGBTQIA+ students to see themselves reflected in the staff and faculty on campus. Representation and visibility also helps students identify their allies and who they can go to for support. With SB 17 hindering so much of the LGBTQIA+ support systems, these one-on-one, informal supports are now even more crucial.

- **Oppose Bills Like SB 17**

Texas legislators must oppose future bills like SB 17. Equality Texas will continue to report on proposed legislation that affects LGBTQIA+ people in Texas and transparently track legislators' voting records.



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