

Testimony 5/14/2024

Anne Lewis, Executive Board member

Texas State Employees Union TSEU-CWA 6186

Senator Creighton and other members of the Committee on Education

Thank you for the opportunity to speak for our union, TSEU-CWA 6186.

We try to believe that the consequences of SB 17 have far exceeded your intentions.

The demanded over-compliance and expansion suggested in parts 2 and 3 constitute an over-reach of government which is generally opposed in your party.

This is from a go-fund-me posted about a week ago: “The recent anti-DEI law and subsequent implementation has created a significant challenge for our program. Due to this law's application, lab funding for our summer internship program has been withdrawn. This was communicated to us after our 15 interns were offered a position in this summer's cohort. Women in Neuroscience remains committed to these interns, and we are hopeful you are, too.” Is denial of opportunity what you had in mind?

In February the Onyx Honor Society, hosted a panel to clarify SB17. The guests included State Representative Ron Reynolds.. I was told that I could not access our department's list-serve to let students and faculty know about the panel because the Onyx Honor Society, UT's first and only Black honors society, under new rules required by the implementation of SB17, was no longer a sponsored student organization. I want to read part of their pledge: “I will stand on the three pillars of Academic Excellence, Leadership and Student Engagement... I will promote Black excellence within the University of Texas at Austin.” Was denial of status for the Onyx Society, the committee's goal?

Finally, TSEU members were fired on April 2, even though the DEI programs they had worked with were in full compliance with the rules of SB17 as of January 1st. These are the words of one of these workers. “By divesting from programs essential for nurturing students from underrepresented backgrounds, our university sends a chilling message: it does not see these students, nor does it seem to want them... Let ‘what starts here’ not just change the world, but first transform the hearts of our leaders to lead with love and empathy.” Thank you.