

Opening Statement of ECESE Ranking Member Bonamici (OR-01)

Subcommittee on Higher Education and Workforce Development

"Divisive, Excessive, Ineffective: The Real Impact of DEI on College Campuses."

2175 Rayburn House Office Building

Thursday, March 7, 2024 | 10:15 a.m.

Thank you very much Mr. Chairman. thank you to the witnesses for being here today.

Once again, instead of having a productive conversation about addressing students' mental health needs, ending campus hunger, or protecting students' civil rights, Committee Republicans have determined it would be a better use of our time to malign campus Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (or D-E-I) programs. Mr. Chairman, I am still processing that you were trying to equate this with cancer, which to me is baffling and pretty offensive to anyone whose had cancer.

As our population grows and access to higher education expands, college campuses are becoming more reflective of our society.

According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), white students accounted for nearly 80 percent of college undergraduates in 1980 and 54 percent in 2020. Hispanic and Latino students increased from 4 percent of the undergraduate population in 1980 to slightly more than 20 percent in 2020.

Thanks to Title VI and Title IX of the *Civil Rights Act of 1964*, campuses are more accessible to women and other racial groups, as well as students who identify as LGBTQIA+, international students, students with disabilities.

And although this is to be celebrated, increases in campus population are not necessarily indicative of changed attitudes or closely held beliefs. In 2020, the U.S. saw 517 reported hate crime incidents on college campuses, with more than half of them motivated by race – and these are only the reported incidents.

Discrimination is also not limited to race, socio-economic status, sexual orientation, and even disabilities. Students can face discrimination based on their religious affiliation as well.

And this is why DEI programs exist. No two programs are alike, but DEI offices exist to address student needs, to give strategic support to faculty, to institutional leaders, to identify hurdles, and assist faculty and staff in serving, educating, and meeting the needs of diverse populations, many of whom are first generation college students.

Regrettably, some Republican-led state legislatures have decided that DEI offices are too costly, and yet these programs barely affect some university budgets. As a result of this legislation, significant cuts have been made to DEI programs.

For example, in 2023, Wisconsin's state legislature proposed cutting 188 DEI jobs from the University of Wisconsin's (U-W) 13 campus system for a total of \$32 million. But DEI employees account for less than 1

percent of the overall number of U-W employees and they are employees that the university determined were important to hire.

Last week, the University of Florida fired 13 DEI officials out of its 19,000 employees in accordance with an anti-DEI initiative championed by Governor DeSantis.

Now I'm sure our colleagues will be able to provide one-off examples or anecdotes of incidents at schools where DEI programming is not fully living up to its mission and not making all students feel safe and welcome on campus. To the extent that is occurring at schools, by all means, we should challenge their DEI programs to improve and change, but that's not a reason to end the DEI programs entirely.

Rather than condemning the programs that are attempting to rectify inequities, this Committee should be focused more on the root causes that lead to inequality in the first place.

So, thank you witnesses for being here, and I yield back the balance of my time.