

LEAD Fund Statement on the University of Florida's Actions to Erase Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI)

Washington nonprofit condemns Florida's efforts to erase DEI programs as part of a bold national campaign to end equal opportunity for marginalized groups

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/EINPresswire.com/ -- The Fund for Leadership, Equity, Access and Diversity ([LEAD Fund](#)), a nonprofit organization based in Washington, DC, has announced its express opposition to actions taken by the University of Florida to eliminate its office of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) and to terminate the staff and administrative positions related thereto. The actions by the University to close its DEI program and terminate its staff were reportedly based on efforts to comply with the state's recent "Anti-Woke" legislation and regulations issued to reverse decades of advances to promote equal opportunity and inclusion for students and faculty.



LEAD Fund Logo

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Dr. Christopher Metzler, Chair of the LEAD Fund Board

Dr. Christopher Metzler, Chair of the Board of the LEAD Fund, stated: “This action to close the DEI program at the University of Florida is part of a nationalized effort to end representation, inclusion and academic freedom at state-funded colleges and universities. The efforts by higher education institutions to recruit and retain qualified individuals of all races and ethnicities, genders and disabilities, and to promote an environment welcoming to all, should be commended not closed and condemned.”

The Fund for Leadership, Equity, Access and Diversity (LEAD Fund) was established to provide thought leadership

in promoting inclusive organizations and institutions through research and education on issues related to diversity, social responsibility, human and civil rights. The LEAD Fund is a “Think and

Do” tank, which advances new knowledge and tested strategies aimed at eliminating prejudice and discrimination. The Fund was founded by board members of the American Association for Access, Equity and Diversity (AAAED), an organization of equal opportunity and diversity professionals established fifty years ago in 1974.

According to an administrative memorandum distributed at the University of Florida on March 1, 2024, the University “has closed the Office of the Chief Diversity Officer, eliminated DEI positions and administrative appointments, and halted DEI-focused contracts with outside vendors.” This memo was issued pursuant to a recent Florida Board of Governor’s Resolution on “prohibited expenditures.” Prohibited expenditures include Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) programs, which are defined as “any program, campus activity, or policy that classifies individuals on the basis of race, color, sex, national origin, gender identity, or sexual orientation and promotes differential or preferential treatment of individuals on the basis of such classification.” Advocacy for DEI Programs is prohibited: (3) when it engages in a program, policy or activity that: (a) Advantages or disadvantages, or attempts to advantage or disadvantage an individual or group on the basis of color, sex, national origin, gender identity, or sexual orientation, to equalize or increase outcomes, participation or representation as compared to other individuals or groups; or (b) Promotes the position that a group or an individual’s action is inherently, unconsciously, or implicitly biased on the basis of color, sex, national origin, gender identity, or sexual orientation. The rules therefore also bar what is mistakenly called “Critical Race Theory.”

“This is part of a poorly-disguised national attack on programs whose mission is to enable members of historically-excluded and marginalized groups to benefit from educational programs that are funded by state taxpayers including themselves,” said Shirley J. Wilcher, President and CEO, of the LEAD Fund.

This anti-diversity campaign is not new. Decades ago, the same arguments were made to undermine equal opportunity and affirmative employment programs, and to limit anti-



Dr. Christopher Metzler



Shirley Wilcher

discrimination investigations, using terms such as “preferential treatment.”

“Now that we are making progress to include all qualified individuals in an increasingly diverse nation, the old forces of resistance are the new activists, using new language, but seeking the same goal to set us back to the pre-Civil Rights era,” Wilcher added.

The LEAD Fund urges U.S. civil rights agencies to conduct vigorous oversight to ensure that federal equal opportunity laws are not violated in this political maelstrom of retrenchment and exclusion.

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