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Introduction:

Picture the moment you watch a police officer kneel on a Black man's ([George Floyd](#)) neck on the side of a busy street with folks watching. To go further, reflect on the moment when police bombarded a Black woman's "[Breonna Taylor](#)" and shot her to death. If you are reading this, I am sure your heart has been tugged on, and you remember where you were sitting in 2020 during a global pandemic. Nevertheless, you may always remember the influence of solidarity of standing against racial injustices and a racial awakening that America had some deep-rooted issues that we have continuously glossed over for decades. Maybe you participated in marches in your city or watched via your television; wherever you were, you felt this immense pressure to be a change agent. Whether that was true action statements, donations, or implementing diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) training, everyone was scrambling around, trying to be reactive change agents. Specifically, being a Black male researcher-practitioner, I had "hope" in 2020 that we were beginning to peel back the layers of America that, for decades, we, as critical scholars and communities of color, have been sharing since slavery. Or so we thought!

In late 2020, the 46th president, Donald Trump, signed an [act](#) federally banning the implementation of DEI training. However, although on state levels, it was decided that many entities could still pursue the need for the training, what it did was provide verbiage for what we are seeing in 2022/2023 with bills banning DEI efforts across the board. Specifically, you see on the state level that there is more detailed content within their "Anti-DEI" legislation that bans DEI offices, training, staff positions, and any form of DEI programming that could be aligned with [left-wing ideology](#). So, three years after a racial awakening, we are plagued with various [states](#) (Texas, Florida, Oklahoma, South Carolina, North Carolina, etc.) who have either passed bills or have introduced Anti-DEI bills. Although there was a feeling that the needle was moving forward, we are backpedaling and being demanded by [right-wing ideology](#) that if we continue to implement DEI initiatives, we would be adding to the divisiveness of America. Because, in reality, there was never a will to change the fabric of America's DNA. The late Toni Morrison stated, "The very serious function of racism is a distraction. It keeps you from doing your work. It keeps you explaining, over and over again, your reason for being." Or as the late Martin Luther King Jr., who is often quoted by many, stated in his "Letter from the Birmingham Jail," "For years now I have heard the word "Wait!" It rings in the ear of every Negro with piercing familiarity. This "Wait" has almost always meant "Never." We must come to see, with one of our distinguished jurists, that "justice too long delayed is justice denied."

Even though we thought America was moving the needle, we have just been hammered down yet again, continuously reminding us that "wait" truly means we will never truly have justice in America, nor does justice seem to be a collective goal. As career services professionals who work or have worked in Texas, this has impacted us deeply that such a heavily populated minoritized state would pass legislation that could hurt the very citizens the state strives to elevate within their workforce agendas. As we strive to understand the direction of our work during an era of Texas Senate Bill 17 (SB17), we felt it was important to share how we have navigated this piece of legislation while also sharing data we collected during a conference presentation this past year. Our goal for sharing this information is to bring community, share research and personal narratives from three professionals, and build solidarity amongst higher

education practitioners. As we stated during our session, it is not if it happens to your state; it is when it will happen to your state.

Director Perspective:

During the development of this presentation, I spoke from the position of serving as an African American female leading a Career Center at a Hispanic-Serving Institution (HSI) in Texas. While presenting to the audience, it was important for me to share quick facts on my institution's demographic, the impact of SB17 on the Career Center, and the psychological impact of SB17 on staff and its position of abandoning DEI initiatives. In addition, as an African American female, it was critical for me to share the internal battle of navigating SB17 while dispelling micro-aggressive/passive-aggressive leadership, policing tone/voice, and code-switching. I believe although it's been a scuttlebutt conversation regarding the implementation of "anti-DEI bills," there has been little to no conversation on how it is impacting Black women who serve in leadership roles. So, it was imperative for me to create a space for our voices to be heard as we enter a scary era of American history. If the pandemic has not taught us anything else, it has taught us that our mental health is vital to the ways in which we show up in our personal lives and professional lives. Moreover, adapting the bill also meant that as a director, I had to develop alternative language to incorporate within our strategic plan to leverage in the HSI Career Center, which included verbiage such as global fluency, first generation, social and economically disadvantaged. While I know it's nothing, we can do to reverse the legislation at this point, what I have realized is that we have to gain an understanding of where we are mentally and understand our real why for doing this work. Finally, we as presenters felt it was important to provide two guiding questions at the beginning of our presentation:

- Why do we need to "move on" from inclusive practices?
- How many of us in the room have concerns and anxiety around SB17?

Employer Perspective:

As a Black man working on the employer relation side of career services at a large state institution in Texas, I shared my vantage points based on my encounters with two employers who were both eager to connect with our students of color. An Energy company wanted to connect with our Black students who were interested in finance, so they requested demographic data about our Black student population in finance at the College of Business. I shared our institutional accountability portal with them and explained how to best connect with our student affinity groups. The other employer was a Strategy Consulting firm that wanted a direct referral (names) to our Black, Native American, and LatinX students. I had to share our policy based on the NACE standards of practice and provide further clarification on how to best recruit affinity groups. Being in employer relations, we must educate employers that this relationship is not about connecting you to affinity groups so that you can fill a quota. We value these student's career goals and aspirations, so we need to truly inspect the employer's intentions. Although we are limited in our scope and what we can do due to DEI parameters, it was important for us as an employer relations team to delve into the workforce DEI efforts. During my preparation for engaging with employers, I created questions that dive deeper into real questions that go beyond the surface to grasp a concept of how corporations' efforts to create a multigenerational and cultural are enforced in their companies.

For example:

- Is their diversity represented from the C-Suite, mid-level, and entry level verticals within the company? It's hard to say you value diversity, when the makeup of your team, department, or company doesn't reflect that.
- Do they have Employee Resource Groups (ERGs) for those students?
- Do you recognize their work and contributions and dismantle systems that oppress them in the workplace?
- Do you have testimonials where you ask them what they want and need and not make assumptions?
- Do you truly amplify their voices, experiences, and perspectives within the workplace?

Ultimately, the answers to these questions not only helped with employer placement at the institutions but it allowed us to be realistic with our employers in what we could or could not do to meet their recruiting needs.

Data Collected:

Through the collection of anonymous index card submissions during our conference presentation. We had the opportunity to learn more about the mental capacity of career services and employers in the southern region of the United States. We posed the question: How many of us in this room have concerns and have experienced anxiety around this bill? We were able to collect 40 index cards from 40 participants in the room, and below, you will find some quantitative data and qualitative data that paint a picture of the current mental state of career services practitioners and employers living in the world of Anti-DEI.

- **90%** of participants felt that the work in which they do will have to change in career services because of legislation restrictions.
- **80%** of participants felt that this legislative decision would cause them to ignore various identities and eliminate identity celebrations, which could deprive a student of identity exploration and comfort as a young college adult.
- **75%** of participants felt a sense of anger, frustration, concern, and anxiety regarding the anti-DEI legislation being passed in various states such as Texas, Florida, Tennessee, North Carolina, etc.
- **10%** of the participants represented private institutions and will not feel the impact but are interested in seeing how they can be of support to their colleagues at public institutions affected by this legislation.
- **5%** of the participants felt that this would impact their ability to do targeted marketing to their unique populations based on the ramifications of disciplinary actions (fired or lawsuit).

Many of the participants who may not currently be affected by active legislation expressed anxiety around “how” to still get the work done and what will happen when it comes to fruition because it will come.

A few participant quotes:

- *Yes, I have concerns because “a threat to Justice anywhere is a threat to Justice everywhere.”*
- *“Working in a fellow ‘deep south’ state that also just elected a highly conservative governor (Louisiana), I can feel my chest tightening just thinking about how SB17 (Texas) will impact our community.”*
- *“I’m concerned about this bill because it’s just another way to push the struggles of minorities to the side. Seems like the color-blind movement. Also, I’m concerned with how this will affect our international students.*
- *“I’m concerned that young college adults will be deprived of identity exploration and comfort in who they are in this world.”*

To engage our readers further, two lingering questions were posed to us through their data submissions that we want to pose to all readers:

- How can non-POC staff show forms of empathy during a time that considers one’s identity legally irrelevant?
- How can private and public universities work together to continue inclusive initiatives? Is there room for support?

Additionally, we have compiled a list of alternative languages collected during our conference session as well, that could be beneficial to your work.

Alternative Language:

Inclusion: involvement, belonging, encompassing, compassion, incorporation, embracement, welcoming, outreach, acceptance, access

Diversity: multicultural, cross-cultural, various, different, necessary, variety, identity, multifaceted, individualities

Equity: fairness, justness, access, impartiality, open-minded, resource allocation, balance, necessary accommodation

Additional Language: Global Fluency, First Generation, Socially and Economically Disadvantage, Authentic, Comprehensive, Equality

Recommendation on Moving Forward:

1. For one, as many of you may incorporate theoretical frameworks within your daily operations, I highly recommend engaging with asset-based frameworks that help challenge individuals' mindsets and how they look at unique populations. For example,

maybe consider Tara Yosso's (2005) Community Cultural Wealth and analyze the ways in which unique community assets are vital to their career development.

- a. The notion is to begin thinking through a lens of global inclusion, where you do not have to set aside particular programs, statements, or events for unique communities on campus, which are heavily being targeted through state legislation.
2. For those who are impacting currently, review FAQ sheets that the institution has created to understand your state bill. Additionally, schedule a meeting with the institution's legal affairs team to gain more direct information as a department to ensure you feel comfortable moving forward.
3. Do what you feel is best for your department and what works for the comfort of the team. If you find yourself stuck and unable to fulfill the duties of inclusive programming, advising, and recruitment, understand that you are not a failure and give yourself grace. However, take that time to see how you can still scale up with this frame of work and still offer a holistic experience for students, alumni, and employers.
4. Lastly, by no way are shooting down whatever choice you feel is best for your department or institution; however, what we are doing is challenging and supporting champions who still want to do this work despite what legislation has plagued us with. In the words of the late John Lewis, we are here for good trouble!

References below:

NACE standards for practice

- <https://www.naceweb.org/career-development/organizational-structure/case-study-when-employers-seek-connections-with-students-from-diverse-social-identities>

OGC Guidance Regarding the Implementation of SB 17 Relating to Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (FAQs)

- https://orec.tamu.edu/sb17-faqs/?utm_source=newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_content=frequently%20asked%20questions&utm_campaign=SB17-system-guidance-Sept7-2023

Texas A&M Accountability Metrics

<https://abpa.tamu.edu/accountability-metrics>