

# [***GOP Kentucky House votes to defund diversity, equity and inclusion offices at public universities***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6BJP-5WD1-DYMD-61H5-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Body**

FRANKFORT, Ky. — The Kentucky House voted Friday to choke off funding for diversity, equity and inclusion offices at public universities following an impassioned debate that had a GOP lawmaker dismissing DEI efforts as a failure and Democrats defending them as pillars of support for students from underrepresented groups.

The overhauled bill passed the House by a vote of 68-18, sending it back to the Senate, which [*passed a much different version*](https://apnews.com/article/kentucky-colleges-diversity-equity-inclusion-legislature-35a95dc23ad73db77797c716aa0fc238). House members stripped away the Senate's language and inserted a replacement that takes a tougher stand on DEI initiatives at public university campuses. The Senate will decide in coming days whether to accept the new version. The GOP has supermajorities in both chambers.

The effort to roll back DEI initiatives in Kentucky is part of a much broader [*Republican campaign*](https://apnews.com/article/dei-state-legislation-diversity-4d80ec7e9d372e74b129efc402ac0b76) featuring bills in several states that would restrict such initiatives or require their public disclosure.

In Kentucky, the House-passed version would ban race-based scholarships and defund DEI offices and staff positions. It would prohibit the Kentucky Council on Postsecondary Education, which oversees public universities, from approving degrees that require courses containing “discriminatory concepts.”

And it would hold public universities accountable to “dismantle the misguided DEI bureaucracies,” said Republican state Rep. Jennifer Decker, who shepherded the new version to House passage.

“This bill would put an end to the failed, expensive and discriminatory DEI initiatives at our public post-secondary schools in Kentucky,” Decker said at the outset of the hourslong debate.

While she insisted the bill would foster a culture that’s “inclusive and welcoming to all,” Democrats said it would hurt minority students on campuses. That includes racial minorities and LGBTQ students but also can be people who are disabled, from rural areas or from low-income families.

“Diversity, equity and inclusion programs are about creating and sustaining environments that support students and faculty who have been traditionally underrepresented on our college campuses, that make them feel safe and welcome,” said Democratic state Rep. Nima Kulkarni.

The sweeping bill also threatens to stifle concepts that professors can teach, opponents said.

"It would disallow the teaching of how oppressive governments create systems of inequality through laws and policies that are structured to marginalize minority groups,” Kulkarni said. “Our students deserve to know our history. They deserve to fully explore all of the progress that we have made.”

Democrats said the backlash to the anti-DEI bill could include economic boycotts, students leaving the state for college and perhaps hurt efforts by Kentucky's university's to recruit Black student-athletes.

In condemning the bill, Democratic state Rep. Cherlynn Stevenson warned that it sends the message to prospective recruits that “we don’t want you to learn about your heritage” but "we’re sure going to use your athletic abilities to further our institutions.”

In a recent letter to the NCAA's president, [*the NAACP*](https://apnews.com/article/naacp-florida-student-athletes-dei-ron-desantis-58e04af22037a70f657ef9775398483d) said Black student-athletes should reconsider attending public colleges and universities in Florida. The letter was in response to the University of Florida and other state schools that have eliminated their diversity, equity and inclusion programs. It was also addressed to current and prospective student-athletes.

“This is not about ***politics***,” the letter read. “It’s about the protection of our community, the progression of our culture, and most of all, it’s about your education and your future.”

The [*U.S. Supreme Court’s decision*](https://apnews.com/article/supreme-court-affirmative-action-college-race-f83d6318017ec9b9029b12ee2256e744) last year ending affirmative action at universities has created a new legal landscape around diversity programs in the workplace and civil society.

Republican lawmakers have proposed about 50 bills in 20 states that would restrict initiatives on diversity, equity and inclusion or require their public disclosure, according to an Associated Press analysis using the bill-tracking software Plural.

Kentucky state Rep. Tina Bojanowski, a Democrat, said such bills pose a threat.

“The threat from authoritarians who use phrases like ‘evil DEI bureaucracy and indoctrination’ to limit academic freedom while imposing their world view upon institutions of higher education cannot be overstated," she said. "A cornerstone of democratic societies is the survival of the institution of higher education, free from political interference and the ideological agenda of autocrats.”

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