



Leadership Conference on Human Rights: Civil Rights Groups Urge California Voters to Reinstate Affirmative Action in Higher Ed

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Body

The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights issued the following news release on Sept. 29:

The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights and more than 70 civil rights and education organizations today wrote in support of California's Proposition 16, which would reinstate affirmative action in public higher education and afford all Californians equal opportunity to fully participate in society. Prop. 16 would repeal Prop. 209, the 1996 ban on affirmative action, and provide an opportunity to rectify years of discrimination against women and people of color in higher education.

"Higher education still remains the surest path to social and economic mobility, which is why it is critically important for communities that have historically been excluded from these opportunities to be fully and affirmatively included. Without full inclusion in higher education opportunities, people of color are being locked out from fully participating in the economy," the groups wrote.

They added, "Now, more than ever, it is important for California to lead the country in ensuring fair access to public higher education. Proposition 209, California's ban on affirmative action, ended up being unfortunately replicated in eight other states. Prop. 16 is the chance to reverse that trend. While we are a nation of states, California's influence on the rest of the country is difficult to overstate, and California must seize this opportunity to show how great the benefits can be when a state chooses to embrace its diversity and be inclusive of all its residents."

The full letter and list of signatories are available [here](#).

On behalf of The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights, a coalition charged by its diverse membership of more than 220 national organizations to promote and protect the civil and human rights of all persons in the United States, and the 70 undersigned organizations representing civil rights and education, we write in support of California Proposition 16 (Prop. 16). By reinstating affirmative action in public higher education, Prop. 16 will afford all Californians equal opportunities to fully participate in society - combating discrimination and prejudice against women and people of color.

As national organizations, we have tracked the negative impact affirmative action bans have had on women, African Americans, Latinos, Asian Americans, and Native Americans, especially in California. Prop. 16 provides an opportunity to rectify that negative impact and ensure that all communities have equal access to opportunities in public higher education. California's future as a state, and our future success as a nation, depends on educating

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and engaging all people - whether they are White, Black, Asian American, Native American, or Latino - to be prepared to participate in civic life. Prop. 16 would do this by ensuring equitable access to higher education.

Higher education still remains the surest path to social and economic mobility, which is why it is critically important for communities that have historically been excluded from these opportunities to be fully and affirmatively included. Without full inclusion in higher education opportunities, people of color are being locked out from fully participating in the economy. The 133 percent pay disparity between college graduates and non-college graduates in California demonstrates the significant benefits access to higher education confers.¹ Additionally, it is important for colleges to reflect the diversity of our society. California, as one of the most diverse states in the country, has a natural advantage in ensuring a diverse student body. Public colleges and universities in California should reflect its residents on their campuses and not the 2 and 3 percent of Black students represented at University of California-Berkeley² and University of California-Los Angeles,³ respectively - nor the representation of Latino students at less than half their percentage in California high schools.⁴ In a recent study, researchers found that the ban on affirmative action in public university admissions led to a decline in systemwide underrepresented group enrollment by at least 12 percent.⁵ This decline in enrollment did not only lead to fewer students from underrepresented groups being enrolled in selective public institutions, it also led to inequitable outcomes in degree attainment and salary stagnation. Proposition 209, which would be repealed by Prop. 16, caused a decline in the total number of high-earning early-30s African American and Latino Californians by at least 3-6 percent.⁶ Moreover, not only does affirmative action promote equality in college admissions and lead to better wages for historically marginalized communities, it also benefits all the students who attend college and better prepares them for their future success in society by giving them an academic experience based in the diversity of our society.

Now, more than ever, it is important for California to lead the country in ensuring fair access to public higher education. Proposition 209, California's ban on affirmative action, ended up being unfortunately replicated in eight other states. Prop. 16 is the chance to reverse that trend. While we are a nation of states, California's influence on the rest of the country is difficult to overstate, and California must seize this opportunity to show how great the benefits can be when a state chooses to embrace its diversity and be inclusive of all its residents.

See signatories here: <https://civilrights.org/resource/national-organization-joint-statement-endorsing-california-proposition-16/>

Footnotes:

1/ Allana Akhtar & Kiersz, A. "College Grads Still Earn More Than Workers with No University Degree. This Map Shows the States with the Widest Salary Gaps." Business Insider. July 15, 2019.

2/ National Center for Education Statistics. "College Navigator - University of California-Berkeley." Fall 2018.

3/ National Center for Education Statistics. "College Navigator - University of California-Los Angeles." Fall 2018.

4/ Based on calculations from California Department of Education and The University of California at a Glance.

5/ Zach Bleemer. "The impact of Proposition 209 and access-oriented UC admissions policies on underrepresented UC applications, enrollment, and long-run student outcomes." UC Office of the President. August 2020.

6/ Ibid.

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