

**NEWS RELEASE**

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## **United Faculty of Florida (UFF) Joins Suit Against State to Defend Freedoms of Students and Faculty**

United Faculty of Florida (UFF) believes that all Floridians — no matter where we're from or what we look like — deserve good jobs, healthy and safe communities, and a high-quality public education from PreK to college. Instead of addressing the real health and economic crises facing Floridians, Gov. DeSantis and some legislators in power in Tallahassee recently enacted the “Viewpoint Discrimination” law (HB 233). This new law scapegoats educators and students while undermining everyone’s rights to free speech, assembly, and privacy. It is a political stunt based on partisan spin and government propaganda. We, as educators, stand behind our students and our profession by exposing the harm of HB 233 and by building a movement to create the public higher education system Florida deserves.

On July 2, 2021, several faculty members and students who work at or attend Florida’s public colleges and universities filed a lawsuit challenging HB 233 in the Northern District of Florida<sup>1</sup>. That lawsuit challenges HB 233 on the basis that it unlawfully targets and discriminates based on viewpoint with the goal of chilling some and compelling other speech, as well as chilling the freedom to associate with groups that share the viewpoints that HB 233 is designed to suppress.

HB 233 does this by mandating that each state college and university conduct an annual “intellectual freedom and viewpoint diversity survey” of faculty and students. While the surveys have not yet been created, the law empowers the state to require faculty and students to reveal their privately held beliefs and associations. The law does not guarantee that students or faculty will have the right to opt out of the survey, or that the responses will either be anonymous or kept anonymous. Moreover, proponents of the bill have threatened that the outcomes of these surveys will be used to target certain viewpoints by pointing to their existence on our public college and university campuses as a basis for cutting funding.

HB 233 also allows students to record classroom lectures without giving prior notice to their instructor or other students and without consent and expressly forbids institutions from “shielding” students, faculty, or staff from “ideas and opinions that they may find uncomfortable, unwelcome, disagreeable, or offensive.” HB 233 also does not define the otherwise extremely broad terms “uncomfortable, unwelcome, disagreeable, or offensive,” creating uncertainty over what might or might not fall within the ambit of those terms. For these reasons, the United

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<sup>1</sup> Link et al. v. Corcoran et al., Case No. 4:21-cv-00271 (N.D. Fla. 2021)

Faculty of Florida has chosen to [join the lawsuit](#) against HB 233 and against the state of Florida.

**Below are reactions from UFF leaders across the state**

“UFF believes in freedom of expression and assembly without fear of retaliation for all Floridians. The right to privacy is central to the American way of life, and the government has no right to know what its citizens think, or with which groups we associate, beyond what we willingly share. Educators should be the ones to educate, and politicians should stay out of our classrooms. HB 233, which threatens to destroy all of these principles and more, should be struck down before it can cause irreparable harm to the state of Florida. Political litmus tests have no place in Florida’s education system, and if left unchecked, this law threatens to turn our state into a place where freedom of speech is a myth, rather than a reality. For these reasons, UFF has joined suit against the state to help protect the constitutional freedoms of Florida’s citizens.”

— **Andrew Gothard, UFF President, [andrew.gothard@floridaea.org](mailto:andrew.gothard@floridaea.org)**

“Students in Florida have access to one of the best systems of higher education in the country. Our dedicated faculty are central to the excellence of our colleges and universities. Restricting freedom and instilling fear will deter faculty from choosing Florida colleges and universities, cheating our students of the education they deserve.”

— **Caitlin Gille, UFF First Vice President, [caitlin.gille@floridaea.org](mailto:caitlin.gille@floridaea.org)**

“HB 233 is a return to the days of the Florida Legislature wanting to ban the teaching of evolution during the 1920s, the targeting of students and faculty supporting and joining the Tallahassee Bus Boycott in the late 1950s, and the McCarthyite effort to require the signing of loyalty oaths to teach. I am concerned that the remarks from our Governor, Speaker of the House, and other supporters of HB 233 have already tied future higher education funding to the results of the “Intellectual Diversity” measures. Floridians have been down this road before — we do not need to revisit this disgraceful history.”

— **Robert Cassanello, UFF-UCF President, [president@uffucf.org](mailto:president@uffucf.org)**

"For students to achieve academic excellence and success during their higher education journey, they require the free exchange of ideas, being exposed to diverse viewpoints, and honed critical thinking skills. These principles are the foundation of higher education and are essential to ensuring a well-rounded future generation of leaders. To achieve these goals, students need opportunities to take intellectual risks, to explore complex ideas, and to have the opportunity to make mistakes free of surveillance and censure. Any obstacles to these fundamental principles, such as HB 233, negate the advancement of ideas, innovation, and a well-informed citizenry."

— **Deandre Poole, UFF-FAU President, [president@ufffau.org](mailto:president@ufffau.org)**

“Faculty and students within Florida’s institutions of higher education have the responsibility of exploring ideological belief systems in order to formulate new knowledge. Restricting knowledge  
**[The Higher Education Affiliate of Florida Education Association, National Education Association, American Federation of Teachers, and AFL-CIO](#)**

limits the ability of faculty and students to collaborate with others locally and globally. Our faculty are experts in their fields of study and should remain stewards of their respective disciplines. Florida's universities and colleges recruit faculty and graduate students that allow us to sustain excellence, and there is no need to chart a different course."

— Martha Meyer, UFF-FIU President, [martha.meyer@uff-fiu.org](mailto:martha.meyer@uff-fiu.org)

"The nation's democracy is at a tipping point where it is crucial to educate citizens on how to deal with pandemics, climate change, inequity, and mistrust in science, institutions, government, and society. It is a frivolous waste of time and taxpayer dollars to pander to ideological or political perspectives cooked up in uninformed and misinformed echo chambers who peddle (a) logical fallacies, (b) theories disproved by repeated and repeatable experiments, and (c) theories considered highly improbable by an overwhelming majority of recognized experts based on reliable information sources that have been critically corrected for bias."

— Meera Sitharam, UFF-UF Vice President, [executive@uff-uf.org](mailto:executive@uff-uf.org)

"As a graduate of Florida's public schools from PreK to graduate school, I know personally how informed and challenged I was by Florida's excellent educators. Our lawsuit is about protecting that learning environment and allowing students to explore and grow without government interference and discrimination based on one's political viewpoints. This new law injects 'gotcha' politics into the classroom while weaponizing funding decisions, to the detriment of us all."

— Candi Churchill, UFF Executive Director, [candi.churchill@floridaea.org](mailto:candi.churchill@floridaea.org)

Additional contact information or background available upon request.

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*The United Faculty of Florida represents over 25,000 faculty at all 12 public universities, 15 colleges and Saint Leo University, along with graduate assistants at four universities.*