PROTECT *the* PUBLIC'S TRUST

Submitted via email August 14, 2025

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U.S. Department of Justice
Civil Rights Division
Attention: Title IX Legal Manual Coordinator
P.O. Box 66560
Washington, D.C. 20035-6560
Email: COR.CRT@USDOJ.GOV

Re: Titles VI and IX Complaint Against Iowa Board of Regents Schools

To Whom it May Concern,

I write to you to alert you of an effort by officials from Iowa Board of Regents' member schools, Iowa State University (ISU) and University of Iowa (Iowa), to continue their practice of imposing Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) on their students, despite perceived efforts to end that practice. Dr. Susan Harper, Director of the ISU LGBT Center was filmed describing "loopholes" in a new Iowa law in order to institutionalize DEI. Cassandra Gordon-Fletcher, Senior Director in the Office of Access and Support at the University of Iowa similarly stated that the school is "reimagining" how they're doing DEI. DEI is inherently discriminatory and runs afoul of Title VI and Title IX of the Civil Rights Act. Due to the nature of the evidence, we believe these actions extend far beyond merely a couple employees and may be orchestrated, endorsed, or sanctioned by higher-ranking officials within these institutions. Accordingly, we request that you promptly investigate the schools' potential violations.

PROTECT *the* PUBLIC'S TRUST

I. Who We Are

Protect the Public's Trust (PPT) is a nonpartisan organization dedicated to promoting ethics in government and restoring the public's trust in government officials. It is imperative in light of severe social challenges America has suffered in the last several years that institutions, especially educational institutions, maintain their credibility with the American people. Educational institutions should be held accountable to ensure that their primary purpose, education, is maintained. There is no place in education for inherently discriminatory curriculum, decision-making, admissions, or campus access.

II. Background

DEI is an amorphous term, but generally focuses on prioritizing opportunities for specific classes of people. The Center for Racial Equity in Education, for example, defines it as "a set of principles and practices aimed at creating fair, respectful, and inclusive environments. DEI efforts seek to acknowledge and address systemic inequalities, promote equitable opportunities and representation, and create spaces where every individual can thrive and be reflected regardless of their age, race, religion, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, and mental or physical ability."[1]

The effort, guised as "equity," means that perceived unequal classes of people, receive more opportunity and more access than those who are not perceived as unequal. In practice this means that minority students will receive opportunities that white students do not. LGBT students will receive opportunities that the rest of students do not get, etc. This effort is, by definition, discriminatory.

Shortly after President Trump signed Executive Order 14151, which banned DEI in places like universities, Governor Kim Reynolds of Iowa ordered the Iowa Board of Regents to comply.[2] On May 27, 2025, Governor Reynolds also signed House File 856, a new law, which took effect July 1, 2025, that bans state funding of any official whose purpose is to serve as a DEI officer in state agencies or institutes of higher education.[3] However, the Board of Regents, which oversees Iowa, ISU, and the University of Northern Iowa, has delayed embedding this law into its policies.[4]

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[1] "DEI in Education," Center for Racial Equity in Education, accessed August 11, 2025, https://www.creed-nc.org/unc-diversity-equity-inclusion.
[2] Office of the Governor of Iowa, "Gov. Reynolds Responds to Video Comments on DEI Instruction at the University of Iowa," July 29, 2025, accessed August 11, 2025, https://governor.iowa.gov/press-release/2025-07-29/gov-reynolds-responds-video-comments-dei-instruction-university-iowa.
[3] Iowa General Assembly, *House File 856*, 91st General Assembly, accessed August 11, 2025, https://www.legis.iowa.gov/legislation/BillBook?ga=91&ba=HF%20856
[4] Spitalniak, Laura, "Iowa Board Reworks anti-DEI Course Policy Proposal Following Pushback," Higher Ed Dive, August 8, 2025, https://www.highereddive.com/news/iowa-board-reworks-anti-dei-course-policy-proposal-following-pushback/757219/.

At least two of Iowa Board of Regents schools appeared to have efforts underway to undermine both Executive Order 14151 and Iowa House File 856. Dr. Susan Harper at ISU was caught on camera stating, "We are finding ways to be in compliance with the law and still do the work that needs to be done."[5] To keep DEI at the school, "we have had to sort of shift some of our programming, like the work goes on."[6] "If they're gonna light the hoops on fire, let's take the game to them."[7] "I think there's going to be some positions in our…right now it's the Office of Multicultural Student Affairs…that name won't last, but there's some, some work down there, I think."[8] She then went on to describe how it would be helpful to have employees who are "like advisors" in the different colleges, such as the Engineering College.[9]

Cassandra Gordon-Fletcher, at Iowa, described similar strategies in place at her school. She said that, despite the law, the DEI efforts are still operating, "thanks to our [university] president."[10] To keep it going, the school would have to "reimagine in a certain way." "We're not going to be operating the same way in which we did before."[11] Rather, the programs would be folded into another program called "BUILD."[12] But the Office of Access and Support is still "a part of…doing those [DEI] workshops."[13] "It's not going away; we're just reimagining how we're doing it."[14]

After the initial release of the Iowa video, AIM reported that the University of Iowa "reached out to Accuracy in Media to confirm that Cassandra Gordon-Fletcher is no longer employed by Iowa State University and that her position was eliminated."[15] Likewise, ISU has put Dr. Harper on leave.[16] However, the evidence indicates that there is a pattern at Iowa Board of Regents schools to continue the status quo of imposing DEI values while creating an outward appearance of compliance, and that this behavior and associated attitude extend far beyond just a few individuals. Indeed, Gordon-Fletcher said this effort is "thanks to our president," indicating this is a top-down effort.

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[5] AIM Staff, "Iowa State LGBT Center Director Finds 'Loopholes' in anti-DEI Law," Accuracy in Media, August 10, 2025, https://aim.org/2025/08/10/iowa-state-lgbt-center-director-finds-loopholes-in-anti-dei-law/.
[6] Ibid.
[7] Ibid.
[8] Ibid.
[9] Ibid.
[10] AIM Staff, "University of Iowa Senior Director Details Covert 'Strategy' to Keep DEI," Accuracy in Media, August 12, 2025, https://aim.org/2025/08/12/university-of-iowa-senior-director-details-covert-strategy-to-keep-dei/.
[11] Ibid.
[12] Ibid.
[13] Ibid.
[14] Ibid.
[15] Ibid.
[16] Iowa's News Now, "Third State University Employee in Iowa Caught in Controversial DEI Compliance Video," Iowa's News Now, August 12, 2025, https://cbs2iowa.com/news/local/third-state-university-employee-caught-in-controversial-dei-compliance-video.

III. Analysis

Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964[17] states that "No person in the United States shall, on the ground of race, color, or national origin, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance."[18] The Education Amendments of 1972, known as Title IX, states that "No person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance." Thus, it violates federal statute when a university extends priority to one race over another or one sex over the other.

Indeed, in the context of race, the Supreme Court recently found that the University of North Carolina system's practice of considering race when making admissions decisions violated the Equal Protection Clause and Title VI of the Civil Rights Act.[19] The Opinion of the Court, as delivered by Chief Justice John Roberts, declared, "Eliminating racial discrimination means eliminating all of it." Discrimination cannot be justified by a racial classification system "that imposes disadvantages upon persons…who bear no responsibility for whatever harm the beneficiaries of the [race-based] admissions program are thought to have suffered."[20]

The reasoning was broad, which means it applies to more than just admissions practices. Schools "may never" use a racial "stereotype or negative."[21] Second, "distinctions between citizens solely because of their ancestry are by their very nature odious to a free people whose institutions are founded upon the doctrine of equality."[22] To do this invokes strict scrutiny, to which the goal of "diversity" does not pass.[23]

So-called gender diversity, a type of DEI, would also violate federal statutes. This could manifest itself in various ways. Some DEI efforts seek to "support women in the workplace" or education by giving preference to women to be placed in leadership roles.[24] In others, women are losing opportunities to males who wish to participate in women's athletics. In these instances, DEI would also violate Title IX.

The Iowa universities are clearly continuing their practice of imposing DEI on their campuses. It is no matter whether the discriminatory practices are official and transparent or are done in the shadows and in secret. Discrimination is discrimination. In any effort to provide access,

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[17] 42 U.S.C. §§ 2000d et seq.
[18] 42 U.S.C. § 2000d.
[19] *Students for Fair Admissions v. President and Fellows of Harvard College*, 143 S.Ct. 2141 (2023)("SFFA").
[20] *Id*. at 2174, *quoting Regents of the University of California v. Bakke*, 438 U.S. 265, 362 (1978).
[21] *SFFA* 2166.
[22] *Id*. at 2150, quoting *Rice v. Cayetano*, 528 U.S. 495, 517 (2000).
[23] *Id*. at 2166.
[24] See e.g. "Women and Workplace Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion," Glen Guyton, accessed July 23, 2025, https://www.glenguyton.com/blog/women-and-workplace-diversity-equity-and-inclusion/.

resources, to teach students discriminatory worldviews, or in any way imposes DEI on campus, the officials are promoting discrimination on the basis of race and sex.

Additionally, the fact that two of the three universities are doing this in secret demonstrates that it is a systemic problem that perhaps also exists at the third Iowa university, demonstrating the need for further investigation into the entire Board of Regents system. And, the Department of Education should hold these universities accountable to the extent the Department deems appropriate.

For the record, I give OCR my consent to disclose my name and other personal information contained in this Title IX complaint to others for OCR's investigation of, and enforcement activities related to, the complaint. I am not interested in participating in early mediation. I do not have an attorney representing me in this matter. I have not complained about these allegations to any school, the State of Iowa or any other state or federal agency.

Sincerely,

Michael Chamberlain
Director
Protect the Public's Trust