



Mr. Brian Lamb, Chair  
Florida State University System Board of Governors  
383 Madison Ave, Floor 39  
New York, NY, 10179-0001

Dear Mr. Lamb,

An article from the *Tallahassee Democrat* on February 7 reported that you said you had not heard much criticism of Governor DeSantis's plans for higher education in Florida. The American Association of University Women of Florida (AAUW), with 30 chapters statewide, objects to these plans. We believe that the "Stop WOKE Act" and subsequent executive actions suppressing the teaching of certain topics concerning racial and gender inequities are damaging to Florida higher education and our students. These changes will not only damage the national and international reputation of our institutions, but also damage their effectiveness in preparing citizens of a democracy.

AAUW's national Public Policy Priorities, voted in by members every two years, include academic freedom: "AAUW believes that high-quality public education is the foundation of a democratic society and the key to improving economic prosperity and gender equality... We support academic freedom, civic education, protection from censorship, bias-free education, and responsible funding for all levels of education." The American Association of University Professors (AAUP) considers academic freedom the foundation of excellence in higher education: "As widely understood in the academic community, academic freedom is essential to allow for the unfettered search for knowledge and does not exist for the benefit of the individual faculty member but for the sake of education in service to the greater good."

That greater good is not just material progress and practical job preparation, but also progress toward a more just and equitable society. Faculty must have academic freedom to explore such directions, but the threat of retaliation has already forced Florida faculty to change their course plans. *Pro Publica* reported on January 3 that Florida faculty were already canceling courses or modifying their teaching out of fear. In a democracy, faculty should not be fearing state interference. And as reported in *Time* (Feb. 13-20), Mira Murati, chief technology officer of OpenAI, called for "different voices, like philosophers, social scientists, artists, and people from the humanities" to help determine the direction of technology development. These voices are cultivated by universities that foster a free exchange of ideas, not ones where certain visions of an ideal America are suppressed by government.

AAUW's story dates back to 1881. Our foremothers fought for a university education for women because this was the highest standard for the development of human knowledge and informed judgment. If self-interested governments are allowed to dictate what may be taught and what may not be taught, this standard will be lost.

For excellence in higher education in Florida,

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