

## **Alabama Anti-Truth Efforts: An Overview**

Alabama is facing attacks on truthful and inclusive education. These attacks include regulations, potential legislation, and even advocacy groups targeting teachers who pledge to advance equity. The state has already implemented a measure targeting truthful discourse in Alabama's classrooms. In October 2021, the Alabama State Department of Education codified a resolution that put at risk educators' freedom to teach the full and accurate history of racial discrimination and civil rights in Alabama and the United States and the impact of that history today. This anti-truth resolution was passed despite vocal opposition from parents, civil rights advocates, and other Alabamians.

In addition, in 2022, Alabama legislators filed four bills—three House bills and one Senate bill— that, if enacted, would have threatened truthful and honest discussions of history in classrooms, universities and state agencies. These bills could have prohibited teaching and training on concepts related to race, religion, and gender and sexual orientation. Strong advocacy from concerned citizens committed to truthful education stopped these bills from becoming law.

For the 2023 Alabama legislative session, House Bill 7 (HB7) was pre-filed as another attempt to stifle truthful education in Alabama public schools and entities.

[House Bill 7] would prohibit certain public entities, including state agencies, local boards of education, and public institutions of higher education, from promoting or endorsing, or requiring affirmation of, certain divisive concepts relating to race, sex, or religion.

This bill would prohibit certain public entities from conditioning enrollment or attendance in certain classes or trainings on the basis of race or color.

This bill would also authorize certain public entities to discipline or terminate employees or contractors who violate this act.

The term "divisive concepts" is related to the nationwide movement to censor free speech about race, sex, sexuality, and systemic inequalities that will impact the accurate and truthful teaching of American history and current events. In addition to preventing the discussion of "divisive concepts," HB7 would prohibit schools and universities from applying for federal, public or private funding for purposes that promote "divisive concepts" or mandating attendance or participation in training or courses that do so. Employees and contractors who break the terms of HB7 could be disciplined or fired by state agencies, local school boards, and colleges. A related bill before the Alabama legislature this session, House Bill 6 (HB6), purports to empower parents, but may, in fact, create further tension between parents and educators by subjecting teacher's expertise to subjective lay approval of a select few parents.

Read more to learn how attacks on truthful education can harm students, educators, and communities.

### **Preserving Alabama's History & Confronting the Legacy of Inequality**

- The Civil Rights Movement was born in Alabama. The tragedies and triumphs that took place in Alabama—from the Montgomery Bus Boycotts to the Children's Crusade in Birmingham to the Selma Bridge Crossing—awakened the entire nation to the reality of racial injustice in America. This full history must be taught.
- If anti-truth efforts succeed, the struggle, hardship, and history of Alabama and the Civil Rights Movement may be censored. The honest recounting of Alabamian history—the good and the bad—which is commemorated in museums across the state, must be protected. We must support our students'

freedom to learn about accurate U.S. and Alabamian history, modern day experiences of racism and other forms of discrimination, and how that history contributes to current inequalities.

- History tells us that truth is essential for a society to grow. We cannot progress further and build a better state and a better nation if we are prevented from talking about our state and country's past.

### Threatening Truthful & Inclusive Education

- State and federal civil rights laws already ban discrimination on the basis of race, sex, ethnicity, religion, color, or national origin – which is what many anti-truth efforts claim to target. In reality, these efforts – and the confusing language many of them use – may chill students' and educators' discussion of race, gender, and sexual orientation in the classroom.
- Anti-truth efforts are dangerous. They threaten the rights of students in Alabama to a full, inclusive, quality education, and could prohibit K-12 and college educators from teaching the full and accurate history of racial discrimination and civil rights in Alabama and the United States or discussing the ongoing struggle for equality and racial justice.
- Many anti-truth efforts use vague and ambiguous language. Their broad, unspecific, and yet far-reaching language makes it difficult for students and educators to know what is and is not prohibited by them.
- Education that is historically accurate and inclusive of the experiences of Black Americans, Indigenous people, women, and other marginalized groups is the quality education that all students deserve. Anti-truth efforts are likely to disproportionately harm students of color, LGBTQ students, and girls by preventing them from talking freely about the history, experiences, and viewpoints of their communities.
- Alabama's current curriculum standards require teaching the civil rights movement, African American history, and stories from "diverse cultures." Teaching these concepts and providing an inclusive education [has been shown](#) to improve students' academic performance and reduce the likelihood that students will experience discrimination in school. Alabama's leaders should promote and expand inclusive education, not undermine it through anti-truth efforts.

### Context: Anti-Truth Efforts Across the Country

- Many anti-truth efforts in Alabama use language first seen in former President Trump's Executive Order 13950. Before it was rescinded by the Biden Administration, a federal court found that the Executive Order likely violated the First Amendment and due process rights of organizations that teach and train about race, gender, and diversity. In Florida, a preliminary injunction was entered in 2022 and affirmed in 2023 preventing the "Stop W.O.K.E. Act," a bill similar to Alabama's HB7, from taking effect due to its unconstitutionality.
- Similar anti-truth efforts, including legislation, have restricted classroom conversations and instruction in a way that disproportionately harms students of color, LGBTQ students, and girls. After an anti-truth bill was passed in Oklahoma, [teachers were instructed](#) to avoid the use of phrases like "diversity" and "white privilege" and books by non-white authors and women. After a similar bill was passed in Texas, [districts began to ban books](#) by authors of color, LGBTQ authors, and women authors, and educators were instructed to teach "[opposing...perspectives](#)" on the Holocaust. In Florida, even though [federal courts have twice blocked](#) the "Stop W.O.K.E. Act" from taking effect, the passage of this anti-truth legislation has still had a [chilling effect](#) on speech and curricular offerings.
- Critical race theory or "CRT" is an academic and legal framework that has long identified racism as being not just individual bias and prejudice, but a systemic phenomenon that is embedded and observable in American institutions and society – from education and housing to employment and healthcare.
- The term "critical race theory" has been turned into a scaremongering label by politicians seeking to silence discussions about systemic racism, attack the truthful teaching of American history, and reverse progress toward racial justice. For example, Alabama Representative Ed Oliver, a support of HB 11, erroneously [argued](#) that CRT "flies in the face of the Civil Rights Act," which was supposed to create a

level playing field for everyone in this country “but apparently was not good enough.”

### Impact on Students

- *All* of Alabama’s students need and deserve quality education that reflects the lived experiences of the diverse communities they come from and the rich history of Alabama – including its key role in the Civil Rights Movement.
- The right of Alabama’s students to have honest and open classroom dialogue about race, gender, and sexual orientation – and the full history of the civil rights movement – is in danger of being suppressed by this sweep of harmful anti-truth efforts.
  - These politically motivated efforts may chill critical discourse about race, gender, and sexual orientation in Alabama.
  - These efforts are attacks on all students’ right to a fair, full, and truthful education about their state and country.
- All young people, especially students of color and students who identify as LGBTQ+, have the right to learn and talk about the history, lived experiences, and perspectives of historically marginalized people in our state and our nation. We must not shy away from discussing difficult topics with students in age-appropriate, thoughtful ways.
- Students have a right to learn about our past and its impact on our present.
- All students deserve access to an education that prepares them to succeed in college, career, and life and to fully exercise their social, political, and economic rights.

### Impact on Educators

- These anti-truth efforts are a dangerous attempt to scare educators into silence on important matters about race, gender, and sexual orientation in our history and in current events. Many of these efforts use language, including key terms like “divisive concepts,” that is open to different interpretations and may chill Alabama educators’ ability to discuss the past and present-day inequities.
- These efforts open the door for politicians and bureaucrats to interfere with public school curricula – presenting the risk of political motivations overruling students teachers’ training, expertise, and best judgment.
- Though the term, “parents’ rights” prefacing a bill may sound empowering, these vague bills overlook the rights parents already possess. Similar bills have been used to create division between educators and parents, potentially forcing teachers to have their lesson plans approved by parents, creating a hostile climate for teachers that could drive them out of the education field. Teachers’ curricula is already required to meet state standards.