



Metropolitan Nashville and Davidson County, TN

Legislation Text

File #: RS2024-353, **Version:** 1

A resolution opposing legislation vacating the state university board of Tennessee State University and allowing the management, governance, powers, and duties to be transferred to the Tennessee higher education commission.

WHEREAS, Tennessee State University was founded in 1912 as the Tennessee Agricultural & Industrial State Normal School and in 1922 gained status as a College granting bachelor's degrees; and

WHEREAS, during the era of Jim Crow segregation, the State of Tennessee underfunded Tennessee Agricultural & Industrial State Normal School and did not provide the same level of support for its operations, infrastructure, faculty and administrative salaries, facilities as it did for other state institutions that excluded African Americans; and

WHEREAS, in 1951, the Tennessee State Board of Education approved the college's university status and changed its name to the Tennessee Agricultural & Industrial State University, which later achieved full land-grant university status entitling it to federal funding with state funding matches; and

WHEREAS, in 1968 the state legislature changed the name of the university to Tennessee State University. Throughout all the institutional changes, the school remained one of the country's leading historically Black colleges and universities and a preeminent center of higher education for Black students in Tennessee; and

WHEREAS, in 1968, Vanderbilt Law School student and History instructor at Tennessee State University, Rita Sanders Geier, filed suit against the State of Tennessee for maintaining a dual educational system that discriminated against African Americans. The facilities at Tennessee State University were inferior, the institution had fewer resources, and its faculty and staff were underpaid compared to predominately white institutions of higher learning in the state; and

WHEREAS, with the assistance of Civil Rights attorney, Avon Williams, Geier and her co-plaintiffs prevailed in the decade long case which led to the merger of Tennessee State University and the University of Tennessee Nashville. This moment was significant because Tennessee State University retained its identity as a Historically Black College and University as a result of the case, a rare outcome when predominantly white and historically Black universities merge; and

WHEREAS, in 1984, the Geier Consent Decree required the State of Tennessee to improve the facilities at Tennessee State University, create additional scholarships to increase enrollment of African American students at white universities, and diversify employment at all its state institutions; and

WHEREAS, in February 1990, Tennessee State University students, led by Jeff Carr, President of the University's Student Government Association, brought attention to the State of Tennessee's lethargic compliance with the Geier Consent Decree by engaging in a sit-in in the offices administration building; and

WHEREAS, in 2017, the University along with others overseen by the Tennessee Board of Regents, was placed under its own authority. As such, the Tennessee State University Board of Trustees was created; and

WHEREAS, according to a federal analysis, the state has underfunded the University significantly for decades by as much as \$2.1 billion and according to a Tennessee legislative committee finding, the state has

underfunded the University by as much as \$544 million; and

WHEREAS, in recent years the state has invested approximately \$250 million for University capital improvements; and

WHEREAS, in early 2023, an audit from the Tennessee Comptroller identified concerns with University leadership, and subsequently another audit was ordered with results forthcoming after continued cooperation from the University; and

WHEREAS, on the heels of issuing a new audit, the significant capital investment, and the reports of decades-long underfunding by the state legislature, the general assembly has proposed HB1739/SB1596 to vacate the current Board of Trustees and reconstitute the Board with new members; and

WHEREAS, simultaneously, the general assembly has proposed HB2346/SB2109 to provide for the transfer of the management, governance, powers, and duties of the state university board to the Tennessee Higher Education Commission if the state university board is vacated and not immediately reconstituted; and

WHEREAS, the passage of both bills will allow for the state to vacate and immediately take control of the Tennessee State University Board of Trustees; and

WHEREAS, removing the current Board of Trustees, some of whom have served since the Board's inception, would harm the University's students, programs, and capital improvement progress by eliminating valuable institutional knowledge; and

WHEREAS, the bills would seize authority from the University and its duly appointed board in an unprecedented manner and unfairly impede the institution as it searches for a new University president to replace the retiring Dr. Glenda Baskin Glover; and

WHEREAS, these bills give the impression that the State of Tennessee is committed to continuing its 112-year policy of not treating Tennessee State University in the same manner as its other institutions of higher learning in the state, despite the university's board, administration, faculty, and staff maintaining an institution that has received the coveted R-2 Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education designation. As of fiscal year 2020, the State of Tennessee spends \$6773 more per student at the University of Tennessee Knoxville, than it does at Tennessee State University, the state's other Land Grant college; and

WHEREAS, the Tennessee General Assembly should reject legislation vacating the state university board of Tennessee State University and allowing the management, governance, powers, and duties to be transferred to the Tennessee Higher Education Commission.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE COUNCIL OF THE METROPOLITAN GOVERNMENT OF NASHVILLE AND DAVIDSON COUNTY:

Section 1. The Metropolitan Council hereby goes on record as opposing legislation vacating the state university board of Tennessee State University and allowing the management, governance, powers, and duties to be transferred to the Tennessee Higher Education Commission.

Section 2. The Metropolitan Clerk is directed to send a copy of this Resolution to each member of the Davidson County Delegation to the Tennessee General Assembly.

Section 3. This Resolution shall take effect from and after its adoption, the welfare of The Metropolitan Government of Nashville and Davidson County requiring it.