

May 26, 2023

Office of Governor Ron DeSantis
State of Florida
The Capitol 400 S. Monroe St.
Tallahassee, FL 32399-0001

RE: Florida Legislative and Regulatory Discriminatory Practices

Dear Governor DeSantis:

I am writing to express the deep concern of The Gerontological Society of America (GSA) regarding discriminatory legislation enacted in Florida and harmful policies promulgated by your administration. Your administration has championed a long series of laws and policies that hurt Floridians and damage the Sunshine State's standing, including:

- Dismantling diversity, equity, and inclusion programs at state colleges and universities, expanding the hiring and firing powers of university boards and presidents, and limiting protections for tenured faculty members. (SB 266)
- Prohibiting instruction on race relations or diversity that imply a person's status as either privileged or oppressed is necessarily determined by his or her race, color, national origin, or sex. (HB 7)
- Discriminating against and excluding sexual and gender minority individuals, particularly transgender individuals, and youth. (HB 1557)
- Prohibiting both schools and workplaces from "subjecting any student or employee to training or instruction that espouses, promotes, advances, inculcates, or compels such individuals to believe specified concepts constitutes discrimination based on race, color, sex, or national origin." (HB 7)
- Prohibiting classroom instruction about sexual orientation or gender identity through grade 12. (expansion of HB 1557)
- Rejecting students' access to Advanced Placement African American studies courses. (2/7/23 Letter to College Board)
- Implementing policies intended to suppress voting. (SB 7050)

GSA is the professional membership organization representing individual researchers, clinicians, and educators who study all facets of the aging process across the life course. As such, many GSA members are actively involved in studying — and are passionate about — public policy, the long-term impact of inequality, and issues of social justice.

The Gerontological Society of America is more than 75 years old. Our Society serves as a voice for advancing the study of aging. We recognize the need to be intentional in our actions to achieve our

highest ideals. For these reasons, we make an active and conscious effort to challenge racism and discrimination in any form and view this as central to our ideals of creating an equitable, diverse, and inclusive Society that promotes meaningful lives for all as we age. **We strongly oppose interventions to censor the teaching of science or limit academic freedom.** Sharing research findings and discussing these issues is crucial for preparing the next generation of scientists. Preventing faculty members from the open inquiry necessary to solve the challenges facing us all as we age jeopardizes the future of our field and undermines the scholarly excellence that Florida institutions have been known for.

GSA is hosting its 2023 Annual Scientific Meeting in Tampa, Florida, from November 8 to 12. This event regularly brings 4,000 attendees from around the world to share new scientific discoveries related to aging. Unfortunately, your legislative and policy actions to restrict academic freedom, prohibit teaching and persecute sexual and gender minorities members were signed into law after our multiple contracts for meeting and hotel space in Tampa were arranged and signed.

Although we are buoyed by and supportive of Tampa's demonstrated inclusiveness — the city received a perfect 100 scorecard for the Municipal Equity Index designed by the Human Rights Campaign Foundation — we will not be able to host future events in Florida while the current laws and policies remain in place.

We urge you to work with Florida state legislators to repeal these discriminatory laws and work with your state agencies to repeal these reprehensible policies. Furthermore, **we highly encourage the legislature and your administration to focus efforts to improve quality of health care, school funding, and services and supports for older people, all areas where Florida continues to languish toward the bottom of state rankings.**

Sincerely,



James C. Appleby, BSPHarm, MPH, ScD (Hon)
Chief Executive Officer



James F. Nelson, PhD, FGSA
GSA President

cc: Mayor Jane Castor, City of Tampa

GSA policy is to embed diversity and inclusion as fundamental principles and practices as we pursue greater equity across the Society. To read the full board-approved GSA Policy on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, visit the [Commitment to Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Webpage](#).