PROTECT *the* PUBLIC'S TRUST

Submitted via email October XX, 2026

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U.S. Department of Justice
Civil Rights Division
Attention: Title VI Legal Manual Coordinator
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Submitted via mail

Missouri Department of Higher Education & Workforce Development
P.O. Box 1469
Jefferson City, MO 65102

Re: Titles VI Complaint Against Missouri University (Mizzou); and, Complaint Involving Missouri State Funding

To Whom it May Concern,

I write to you to alert you of an ongoing effort by the University of Missouri (Mizzou) to continue imposing Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) on its campus, despite both federal and state executive orders preventing this practice. As seen in videos recorded by Accuracy in Media, this DEI effort is intentionally covert, performed by a program it calls "The Bridge."

DEI is inherently discriminatory and runs afoul of Title VI of the Civil Rights Act. Mizzou is quietly attempting to violate civil rights laws. Accordingly, we request that you promptly investigate Mizzou's alleged violations.

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 the 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 concept, but it 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]

Implementing DEI 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 students of certain minority groups receive opportunities that white or Asian students do not. The threshold for access is different for one race than it is for another. Similarly, so-called "cis" gendered individuals may be discriminated against. This effort is, by definition, discriminatory.

As President Trump's 2025 executive order – "Ending Illegal Discrimination and Restoring Merit-Based Opportunity" – puts it, "DEI and DEIA policies not only violate the text and spirit of our longstanding Federal civil-rights laws, they also undermine our national unity, as they deny, discredit, and undermine the traditional American values of hard work, excellence, and individual achievement

[1] "DEI in Education," Center for Racial Equity in Education, accessed December 3, 2025, https://www.creed-nc.org/unc-diversity-equity-inclusion.

in favor of unlawful, corrosive, and pernicious identity-based spoils system."[2] President Trump ordered his agencies to take steps to deter DEI in many arenas – including higher education.[3]

Similarly, Missouri authored its own executive order preventing DEI state-wide, including university campuses. Governor Mike Kehoe ordered that no state funds shall be utilized toward policies or practices that "solely or primarily support diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives."[4] This includes "policies, procedures, practices, trainings, contracts, positions, organizational structures, programs, or activities intended to promote differential treatment…"[5]

Under this backdrop, apparently, Mizzou began concealing its DEI efforts. According to an undercover report by Accuracy in Media, a few people revealed that DEI continues.

Ainsley Acuff, an Academic Advisor at Mizzou, said, while speaking to a supposed prospective student about DEI, "I know that the instructors very much care about that as well." "We have a lot of great programming here in our college and people do care about that and want to talk about it and want to push for it." She told the prospective female student that once she arrived, she could get her "connected and involved." She even identified where on campus the DEI efforts were taking place, naming "Townsend" Hall, the "main education building." There, "we have something called The Bridge" that is "really focused on DEI…and run a lot of events and programming, like open discussions and forums."[6]

Another student staff member was also informative, explaining, "The Bridge used to be under what was our DEI office, which has changed in recent years to have wording different," The Bridge's programs are focused on "multicultural" and "social justice issues." When asked, she confirmed that the DEI office had been "renamed" "because of the recent policies that were administered" under federal policy, presumably the executive order. Additionally, the "college engagement and

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[2] Trump, Donald J., "Ending Illegal Discrimination and Restoring Merit-Based Opportunity," *The White House,* January 21, 2025, https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/01/ending-illegal-discrimination-and-restoring-merit-based-opportunity/.
[3] Ibid.
[4] Mo. Exec. Order No. 25-18 (February 18, 2025), https://www.sos.mo.gov/library/reference/orders/2025/eo18.
[5] Ibid., III.a.ii.
[6] Corey A. DeAngelis (@DeAngelisCorey), "BREAKING: @Mizzou official admits they still have DEI…," X, October 13, 2026, https://x.com/DeAngelisCorey/status/2110105823322276192.

recruitment office is what this base is under." "We're still trying to do the work" but it has to "be done under, you know, different wording."[7]

It is noteworthy that The Bridge at least used to be housed under the College of Education and Human Development, but the portion of the website dedicated to the Bridge has been removed.[8] Previously, it was described as a place "to address critical societal needs in education and human development by connecting our shared humanity" and "to expand perspectives on social issues through opportunities of learning, training, and service."[9]

Yet another Mizzou official, Wayne Brekhus, Professor and Chair of the Department of Sociology, repeated the same information.[10] He said that other institutions "found clever ways to, like, continue to have DEI centers but not call them that. It was mostly cosmetic." While he said that the bans have been "tough on research, but so far they haven't hit the curriculum." "Lots of us do DEI types of research…I do things with identities and inequalities…" Asked about anti-racism, he said, "You'll get that in the courses as well."

III. Analysis

Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964[11] 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."[12] Similarly, with regard to employment, it is illegal to "fail or refuse to hire or discharge any individual, or otherwise discriminate against any individual with respect to his compensation, terms, conditions, or privileges of employment because of such individual's race, color, religion, sex, or national origin," or to "limit, segregate, or classify his employees…in any way which would deprive or tend to deprive any individual of employment opportunities or otherwise adversely affect his status as an employee, because of such individual's race, color, religion, sex, or national origin."[13] Thus, it violates federal statute when a university extends priority to one race over another.

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[7] Ibid.
[8] "College of Education & Human Development," cehd.missouri.edu, accessed October 22, 2026, https://cehd.missouri.edu/2026/10/the-bridge-building-connections-growing-student-leaders/.
[9] Corey A. DeAngelis (@DeAngelisCorey), "The @Mizzou College of Education says The Bridge….," X, October 13, 2026, https://x.com/DeAngelisCorey/status/2110105823322276192.
[10] "'It Was Mostly Cosmetic': Missouri Professor Reveals How DEI Survives State Bans," *Accuracy in Media*, September 14, 2026, https://aim.org/2026/09/14/it-was-mostly-cosmetic-missouri-professor-reveals-how-dei-survives-state-bans/.
[11] 42 U.S.C. §§ 2000d et seq.
[12] 42 U.S.C. § 2000d.
[13] 42 U.S.C. §2000e-2(a).

Consistent with Title VI, the Department of Education promulgated rules that also prevent race-based criteria in education. Education programs that "treat an individual differently from others in determining whether he satisfies any admission, enrollment, quota, eligibility, membership or other requirement or condition…in order to be provided…benefit provided under the program" constitute discrimination.[14]

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.[15] 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."[16]

The reasoning was broad, which means it applies to more than just admissions practices. Schools "may never" use a racial "stereotype or negative."[17] 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."[18] To do this invokes strict scrutiny, which the goal of "diversity" does not pass.[19]

Similarly, as it stands, no executive agency in Missouri can issue "state funds" "toward policies, procedures, practices, [etc.]" that "solely or primarily support diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives."[20]

It is alarming that The Bridge – the code word for the DEI programming – is potentially housed under the umbrella of the "college engagement and recruitment office." This means that it is not merely a school program, it is a part of the campus's identity. It means that there is potential that recruiting and admissions implement DEI principles, which would be discriminatory. It also means that campus hiring and programmatic opportunities potentially implement DEI principles, too.

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[14] 34 C.F.R. 100.3(b)(v).
[15] *Students for Fair Admissions v. President and Fellows of Harvard College*, 143 S.Ct. 2141 (2023)("*SFFA*").
[16] *Id*. at 2174, *quoting Regents of the University of California v. Bakke*, 438 U.S. 265, 362 (1978).
[17] *SFFA* 2166.
[18] *Id*. at 2150, quoting *Rice v. Cayetano*, 528 U.S. 495, 517 (2000).
[19] *Id*. at 2166.
[20] Mo. Exec. Order 25-18, II.a.

At the very least, the DEI programs have not changed on Mizzou's campus. Research, which may be federally or state funded, and curriculum are reportedly DEI-focused.

It is important to determine if Mizzou is implementing DEI in discriminatory ways, specifically in admissions, with campus opportunities, or in hiring. It should also be determined if the curriculum forces students to adopt DEI principles, as opposed to merely teaching the concepts. At the very least, there is reasonable suspicion that both may be occurring at Mizzou. Accordingly, because Title VI may be implicated at Mizzou, the appropriate federal civil rights agency or agencies should promptly investigate this matter. If substantiated, the Department should also impose discipline on the university.

Missouri's Coordinating Board for Higher Education has, in conformity with federal regulations,[21] set up a complaint process to enforce state laws.[22] Consistent with Executive Order 25-18, the Missouri Department of Higher Education & Workforce Development should investigate Mizzou to determine whether any of its programs are funded by state funds and solely or primarily support diversity, equity and inclusion initiatives. If so, it should recommend to the appropriate executive authority to stop the state funding.

Sincerely,

Alexa Moutevelis
Communications Director
Protect the Public's Trust



[21] 34 C.F.R. § 600.9(a)(1).

[22] Missouri Department of Higher Education and Workforce Development, "Complaint Resolution Policy," accessed October 22, 2026, https://dhewd.mo.gov/media/pdf/complaint-resolution-policy.