



August 24, 2026

Christian Hardigree  
President,  
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Victoria, Texas 77901

Alyssa Kiesow, Ph.D.  
Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs,  
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3007 N. Ben Wilson St.  
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Dear President Hardigree and Provost Kiesow,

I write to you herein as a private citizen on behalf of the Texas American Association of University Professors-American Federation of Teachers (TXAAUP-AFT).

The TXAAUP-AFT includes member faculty who have brought to our attention a matter of important public concern, as detailed below. The Texas AAUP-AFT is a private organization consisting of thousands of private citizen members on over 100 campuses across Texas and is affiliated with the national American Association of University Professors (AAUP), a 111-year-old professional organization of higher education professors grounded in the principles of academic freedom, shared governance and tenure rights of faculty.

Since its founding in 1915, the AAUP has defined the nation's fundamental professional values and standards for higher education. This letter stems from the principles and best practices for higher education as set forth in, among others, the AAUP's [1915 Declaration of Principles](#), its [1940 Statement on Principles on Academic Freedom](#) (jointly formulated with the Association of American Colleges (ACE) and Universities and endorsed by more than 250 scholarly societies and higher education organizations), its [1966 Statement of Governance of Colleges and Universities](#) (jointly formulated by the AAUP, ACE and the Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges (AGB)) and its 1994 AAUP statement [On the Relationship of Faculty Governance to Academic Freedom](#). Of note, language from AAUP's 1940 statement is cited in Texas A&M System Policy 12.01 (Academic Freedom, Responsibility and Tenure).

As a matter of public concern to taxpayers, faculty, staff, students and the whole institution, the TXAAUP-AFT brings to your attention faculty concerns over what we understand to be over-compliance or misapplication of Senate Bill 2615 by your university and other Texas higher education institutions. Specifically, a number of faculty at your institution expressed to us concerns regarding a recent institutional mandate, based on false premise, that "[i]n accordance with Texas law, faculty are expected to have day-to-day physical presence on campus for in-person interaction

with students, administration, other employees, and the community,” that “[...] in alignment with SB 2615, faculty are expected to be on campus 5 days a week and maintain a 40-hour workweek,” and that “[f]ailure to meet these expectations may subject an individual to discipline, up to and including termination.”

SB 2615 was enacted in the 89th Texas Legislature and went into effect on September 1, 2025. The bill's original intent was to encourage a "reset" after COVID, encouraging faculty to return to an on-campus presence following the pandemic, which had necessitated most faculty to work remotely. It is clear the bill's original intent has now been sufficiently fulfilled. Its continued application serves only to restrict faculty research, curricular and teaching productivity, innovation and optimal service to the students and taxpayers, while placing unreasonable, undue hardship and disparate effects on the personal and professional lives of faculty and their families.

The literal letter of SB 2615 restricts telework at public institutions of higher education, limiting regular off-campus work except in narrow cases such as certain medical accommodations, approved distance education assignments, temporary off-campus research or a declared catastrophe. The bill makes no mention at all as to the number of days or hours of faculty on-campus presence proscribed and certainly does not require faculty to be on-campus five days a week - a schedule which runs counter to the exempt status of full-time professors. Simply, this new unwritten policy is contrary to what it means to be a learned professor, serving only to quash faculty morale - to the detriment of students, the institution and taxpayers. Most faculty do not choose to be professors solely for a paycheck. For most full-time professors, being a professor is a lifestyle, a passion and a calling - a way of life that allows their creativity and contribution to society to flourish in a fairly autonomous way thanks to a historically flexible schedule. Accordingly, “bean counting” their workdays restricts their desire to pursue that passion, to the detriment of students and society. Most full-time faculty put in far more than 40 hours of work per week to their profession. A common joke among faculty is, "Professors' work schedules are flexible - we get to decide when and where we put in our 80 hours per week."

As we understand it, your institution informed faculty just weeks prior to the start of the Fall 2026 term - during summer when they were off-contract - that full-time faculty must now be on campus five days each week on account of SB 2615. We again emphasize the five day per week on-campus edict is an implementation choice *by the institution*, not a mandate written into the bill itself. To our knowledge, the decision to so drastically change the terms, conditions and privileges of full-time faculty employment was made without any shared governance (or any input at all from the faculty) or due process. AAUP professional standards, SACSCOC accreditation standards and arguably even legal standards require a decision of this life-altering magnitude to, at a minimum, include faculty input. For example, Texas Education Code 51.3523(b) states, “[i]nstitutions of higher education in this state shall be governed by a principle of shared governance [...].”

The timing of the impromptu mandate has left many faculty scrambling to rearrange their schedules to accommodate, negatively affecting their professional and personal lives and having a possible disproportional, discriminatory and disparate negative effect on female faculty and those with long commutes to campus. We have already seen multiple outstanding faculty - such as a woman who had recently given birth – be “constructively terminated” – i.e., they had no choice but to “terminate themselves” through resignation because they could not possibly or reasonably comply with this spur-of-the-moment edict. That is not only to the detriment of those faculty

members' livelihoods, family and careers, but also to their students, the institution and the taxpayers who fund the institution.

SB 2615 and its application by several institutions of higher education, including yours, appears to be based on a false premise and full misconception of how faculty and students *actually* work. These days, many - if not most - students often prefer virtual contact with their professors at hours and modalities (such as on Zoom, text, social media or the phone) that fit their busy lives, including evenings, weekends and other times outside a conventional business day. Full-time professors are "exempt" professional employees - not hourly staff. They do not - and for many, cannot - function in five-day-a-week, Monday-through-Friday work environment. They meet students, research, design curricula and programs, grade, write, interact with the community and external colleagues and agencies, and advise whenever and wherever the work requires it, including nights, weekends and holidays, both in person and online. A clock-in, clock-out presence rule treats that professional pattern as absenteeism. It reduces the flexibility that makes extra effort possible and discourages faculty from going the extra mile when students, the institution and the citizenry need them.

Your institution's five-days-on-campus workweek mandate and SB 2615 itself run counter to long-standing professional standards of the AAUP. The 1966 Statement on Government of Colleges and Universities assigns faculty "primary responsibility for such fundamental areas as curriculum, subject matter and methods of instruction." SB 2615 and your institution's application of it directly interferes with the faculty having primary responsibility over the curriculum, subject matter and methods of instruction. The AAUP's [1999 Statement on Online and Distance Education](#) likewise holds that faculty should have primary responsibility for policies on instructional modality and that no course should be offered in a particular format without the consent of the instructor of record and the relevant faculty body. SACSCOC accreditation standards also require that the full-time faculty have primacy over the learning enterprise.

Texas law itself points in the same direction. Education Code § 51.354 states that each institution of higher education has the general responsibility, within its role and mission, to "protect intellectual exploration and academic freedom." A rigid on-campus schedule does not fulfill that duty. Faculty who cannot think and work in the settings that best support their scholarly productivity are constrained in the inquiry § 51.354 requires the institution to protect. Academic freedom is more than just what a professor teaches in the classroom – it extends outside the classroom to encompass their scholarly work, publications, role in institutional shared governance and extramural utterances. And of course, the Supreme Court and other Courts recognize academic freedom as a special concern of the 1<sup>st</sup> Amendment's guarantee to protected free speech. The result of the ill-conceived edict and SB 2615 is not more teaching; it is less room for the irregular, after-hours and intellectually demanding labor that produces curricula, research and genuine student engagement - and with that, diminished innovation and a weaker will to pursue intellectual exploration at its fullest.

The practical effect of SB 2615 and your institution's 5-day-per-week mandate is not evenly distributed across institutions of higher education in Texas, or even within the Texas A&M University System. For example, most institutions are not requiring faculty to be present on campus any set number of days or hours outside their normal teaching, research and office hour schedule, while others are requiring specific number of days and/or hours on campus per week.

This is fundamentally unfair in its simplest form from an "equal pay for equal work" perspective. Further, faculty who are parents of young children, and especially mothers who are pregnant, recently postpartum or nursing, must already coordinate teaching, research and caregiving on schedules that do not resemble a conventional office day. This raises concerns for women's health. Homeschooling parents or those with aging parents who were previously able to do much of their non-teaching work from home now face additional challenges. Homeschooling parents must now, on the turn of a dime, choose whether to stop homeschooling altogether, have their children be home unsupervised or under-supervised, or else put their children in traditional schools, thereby losing their law-backed freedom to make decisions they feel are in the best interests of their children's education. Thus, SB 2615 and institutional misapplications of it run contrary to efforts by the legislature to expand parental educational choice - such as through the Homeschool Freedom Act (HB 2674), the Texas Education Freedom Accounts program and statutory recognition that a parent is entitled to choose public school, private school or homeschool. A proscribed number of days and/or hours on campus outside teaching and scheduled normal office hours makes it harder for faculty parents to exercise the same educational liberty the state encourages for other Texas families.

A more faithful application of SB 2615 would distinguish statutory limits on regular telework from an across-the-board physical presence requirement, honor the institution's duty under § 51.354 to protect intellectual exploration and academic freedom, preserve faculty responsibility for instructional methods, recognize the exempt and irregular nature of faculty work and account for the driving distance, type of classes taught and caregiving and homeschooling realities of the faculty who must live under the new heavy-handed, surprise declaration.

In closing, for the benefit of students, faculty, staff, the institutions and the taxpayers, we respectfully request your institution immediately rescind its new on-campus declaration. Instead, we urge you to embrace a shared governance approach for ensuring compliance with existing statutes and policies, as well as adherence to century-old AAUP professional standards and best practices. We are ready to serve as a resource for how to move ahead to restore good faith and shared governance at your institution. We acknowledge our understanding of this matter comes solely from conversations with our AAUP colleagues and appreciate that you may have additional information which would contribute to our understanding of the situation. We therefore welcome your comments.

Please do not hesitate to reach out to us for further questions for dialogue on this matter. We look forward to your response.

Sincerely,



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