



Legislation Isn't All That Negatively Impacts DEI Practitioners

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In the past two years, professionals who are antidiscrimination practitioners and hold primary responsibilities for reducing inequality in institutions of higher education have faced intense and growing pressure from the scores of state bills that seek to eliminate or curtail DEI offices and programs at colleges and universities. And just this week, a U. S. senator asked the Office of Inspector General to investigate how colleges and universities are investing federal dollars to support DEI initiatives. Unfortunately, in addition to the wholesale dismantling of antidiscrimination initiatives, such legislative efforts—even when unsuccessful— are heightening the challenges that antidiscrimination practitioners face within their own institutions.

One result of the pressure is that antidiscrimination practitioners who work through DEI, equal opportunity, Title IX and other offices—are showing high rates of burnout and job attrition due to “contrapower harassment.” With support from the Center for Institutional Courage, we surveyed 93 such professionals at public and private comprehensive and doctoral universities in the United States in the spring of 2023. We found that they are experiencing high rates of incivility, bullying, condescension, belittling and withholding information, as well as generalized disregard for their feelings and opinions.