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March 12, 2024

Honorable Eric Holcomb
Office of the Governor
Statehouse
Indianapolis, IN 46204-2797

Dear Governor Holcomb,

The American Association of Geographers strongly urges you to veto SB 202, a measure that purports to strengthen intellectual diversity at Indiana's public colleges and universities but instead severely limits academic freedom. In particular, the rights of faculty to teach students from their expertise and knowledge, without regard to ideology or intrusive oversight, is curtailed by the measure. Veiling its intent in language that pretends to indicate high regard for free inquiry, SB 202 instead targets free inquiry by exerting ideological control over professors and classrooms through draconian tenure review policies created and overseen by their boards of trustees.

Tenure policies do not need revision in Indiana. Furthermore, this bill is not a mere procedural tweak, it is a dangerous overstep. Faculty would be denied tenure or promotion if deemed "unlikely to foster a culture of free inquiry, free expression, and intellectual diversity ... unlikely to expose students to scholarly works from a variety of political or ideological frameworks...; or likely...to subject students to political or ideological views and opinions that are unrelated to the faculty member's academic discipline or assigned course of instruction." Is there a future Indiana geography classroom where a casual remark about current events, or the decision to create a course around the works of a single influential geographer, could make a professor subject to disciplinary action, dismissal, or denied tenure?

SB 202 is unlikely to advance cultural or intellectual diversity in Indiana. We ask you to look more closely at the real need in classrooms right now: A recent [Knight Foundation study](#) shows that while many students feel the erosion of free speech protections on campus, white students have the most confidence that their own free speech is protected, while students of color feel the least protected. For true cultural and intellectual diversity to flourish on campuses, professors must feel confident and unthreatened in their careers, so that they can share a range of resources and ideas with their students, and so that historically unheard voices will be heard in the classroom.

We urge Indiana to continue to protect freedom of inquiry in classrooms, by rejecting SB 202.

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