

November 3, 2021

President W. Kent Fuchs  
University of Florida  
president@ufl.edu

Dear Dr. Fuchs:

The American Historical Association objects strenuously to your decision preventing University of Florida faculty members from testifying in a voting-rights case. The AHA does not ordinarily intervene in situations that don't involve historians, but we are making an exception in this case because expert witness testimony is such an important aspect of historians' contributions to public culture. The very idea that a faculty member would be prohibited from making such a contribution on the basis that it could be "adverse to the university's interests as a state of Florida institution" is contrary to the principle that the state university is a resource upon which public institutions such as the courts can (and should) draw for expertise. Such work, rather than a "conflict of interest," is in the very best interest of the people of Florida.

University faculty, including historians, are often called upon to present expert testimony in court cases; such testimony (whether unpaid or paid in recognition of the time spent in preparation) can provide an essential public service by illuminating precedents, offering context, and summarizing data from relevant scholarly studies. A public university is not a political agent of the state in which it is situated; it is a site of learning and scholarly inquiry in service to the residents of that state.

The university's denial of permission to these scholars to testify in court is also a blatant violation of academic freedom. Neither historians nor scholars in other disciplines forfeit their academic freedom when they accept employment at a state institution of higher learning. To abrogate that freedom in order to advance the interests of a particular political party or government official is to challenge the very notion of open inquiry in a free society.

Sincerely,



Jacqueline Jones  
President, 2021



James R. Grossman  
Executive Director