

**March 30, 2023**

To: Senate Higher Education Subcommittee

Re: Written Testimony Submitted FOR SB 200

Honorable Chairman Creighton and Members of the Senate Higher Education Subcommittee,

My name is Victoria Hoover, and I am a proud recent graduate of Tyler Junior College and a current philosophy student at Stephen F. Austin State University studying to become a writer and future community college educator. I am also a member of the Texas Community College Student Advisory Council and advocate for our community colleges and the diverse students they serve, including “nontraditional” ones like me.

I am testifying in support of SB 200 based on my own personal experience being denied the many benefits of an academic fresh start. Today, I am excelling academically. I maintain a 4.0 GPA and will be one of only six finalists from my college presenting academic research as an undergraduate student next month.

Not every young person is ready for college right out of high school; I definitely wasn't. Starting in 1998, I made several unsuccessful attempts at college and my first 57 attempted credit hours left me with a 0.7 GPA. I put off returning to college for years based on these early mistakes. Today, despite maintaining a consistent 4.0, my educational opportunities continue to be limited by my past. After graduating Summa Cum Laude from Tyler Junior College, my grades from decades ago kept me from even applying to our state's flagship universities. I was barely admitted to SFA and needed the head of TJC's honors program to advocate on my behalf to gain entry into the honors program at SFA. Looking ahead, my chances of receiving a Fulbright scholarship for graduate school will be diminished since those awards often go to students from only the most prestigious universities.

After much soul-searching and realizing I wanted more out of life, I decided to re-enroll in the fall of 2020 knowing I needed a degree to get where I wanted to be. I didn't know about the option to clear my academic record and wasn't informed of this right by anyone at my community college. As a result, I enrolled without utilizing Academic Fresh Start. As you consider action on SB 200, I encourage you to do everything in your power as policymakers to help ensure awareness among admissions officers at all Texas higher education institutions, including public 2-year colleges, so they can better inform and support qualifying students who stand to benefit most.

While I understand that current law requires students to invoke the Academic Fresh Start option at the time of application, I urge you to explore the possibility of allowing students to do so post-enrollment under certain circumstances. Had I been able to apply retroactively upon learning about the program, I would have certainly elected to expunge my past record.

College can be challenging enough, especially for nontraditional students. I urge you to support SB 200 and help open doors for Texans who are striving to start over and make the most of their educational opportunities. Thank you for allowing me to share my story and participate in our legislative process.

Sincerely,

Victoria Hoover