

NEWS RELEASE

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United Faculty of Florida (UFF) Demands Names of the University of Florida President Finalist Candidates

The United Faculty of Florida (UFF) questions the legality of nominating U.S. Sen. Ben Sasse as the sole candidate for University of Florida (UF) president. In mid-October, Florida state Sen. Jeff Brandes — who co-sponsored the bill that took Florida’s university and college presidential searches out of the sunshine — stated that UF’s recent search resulting only in Sen. Sasse violated the spirit of the law ([source link](#)). At UFF, we believe that it violates the letter of the law as well.

Florida Statute 1004.098, which governs public records exemptions for university and college presidential applicants, makes no mention of allowing a single applicant to nullify the requirement for “the final group of applicants” to be no longer exempt from Florida’s Sunshine Laws. Instead, under this statute the University of Florida is required to provide the following in their search process:

1. “the age, race, and gender of all applicants who met the minimum qualifications established for the position”
2. “the personal identifying information of an applicant included in the final group of applicants”

The University of Florida has stated [on its own website](#) that the full list of applicants included “more than 700 leaders within and outside of higher education,” and the final pool of applicants was composed of “a dozen highly qualified and diverse candidates. Nine were sitting presidents at major research universities, and seven were from AAU universities.”

As a result, earlier today the United Faculty of Florida submitted a public records request to the University of Florida demanding the information required by Florida statute of the full list of more than 700 applicants and the personal identifying information of the final pool of 12 candidates for the position, in addition to records of meetings that discussed the final group of applicants.

If the university resists its obligations under Florida statute, UFF and our allies intend to take legal action to compel the release of this information and to delay the hiring of any UF president until this statutory requirement has been met. The university community deserves to know which candidates in this search process were considered less qualified than Sen. Sasse, in order to decide for themselves who will make the best president of UF.

Below are reactions from UFF leaders across the state:

“I stood before committees and legislators earlier this year and told them to their faces what would happen if they passed a presidential searches exemption, but legislators on both sides of the aisle ignored me, their constituents and thousands of members of the higher education community. We didn’t want this law, but we without a doubt plan to enforce the shreds of transparency still left in in this process.”

— **Andrew Gothard, UFF President**, andrew.gothard@floridaea.org

“Our public universities are a public good. They are institutions dedicated to education, scholarship and innovation. As such, politics has no place in our public universities. Our entire community has a right to play a role in the choice of the leaders for the institutions that belong to us.”

— **Caitlin Gille, UFF First Vice President**, caitlin.gille@floridaea.org

“The faculty would have preferred an individual who is qualified for the position, not a political appointee. Our students work too hard to get into this university for someone to waltz into the presidency because of his political affiliation. Our faculty have worked too hard to establish traditions of transparency, accountability and merit in our hiring, tenure and promotion processes. This presidential ‘search’ violates these traditions. This is not Tammany Hall in the 19th century. This is the University of Florida.”

— **Paul Ortiz, UFF-UF President**, ortizprof@gmail.com

“The UF community hasn’t had any voice in any step of deciding who our new president will be. We now have a presidential finalist who is not representative of the diverse communities at UF. Our president should come from Florida’s academic community, with research experience, and should represent the interests of all UF’s students, faculty, and staff, not those of the state.”

— **Bryn Taylor, UF Graduate Assistants United (GAU) Co-President**, brynvt@gmail.com

“The naming of Sen. Sasse as the sole finalist for the UF presidential search is just another step in the continued politicization of public education in the state of Florida. The passage of anti-education legislation has shown that Gov. DeSantis and his supporters in the Florida Legislature continue to prioritize power and culture wars over students. Attacks on academic freedom and lack of transparency have grievously damaged the trust between the University of Florida and its students, staff and faculty. We believe that the UF community deserves a voice in the selection of our next president, and the potentially illegal opacity of this process has robbed us of that opportunity.”

— **Rachel Hartnett, UF GAU Co-President**, rmhartnett87@gmail.com