

UT Regent Wallace Hall Encourages Lawmakers to Allow Court to Rule

“Why rush to preempt Texas Supreme Court decision in critical admissions case?”

Austin, TX (Jan. 24, 2017)—University of Texas System Regent Wallace Hall Jr., today encouraged Governor Abbott and State Senators to wait for a key ruling by the Texas Supreme Court in a case relating to admissions abuses at UT-Austin before confirming new regents.

“Why rush, unless there is a preference to preempt the Supreme Court in a ruling Texans have waited years to obtain?” asked Hall. “Governor Abbott can wait for the court and we can all live by the new standards it will set, or he can push the Senate to preempt the court and kill any opportunity for reform.”

Regent Hall filed a lawsuit on June 22, 2015 to require UT Chancellor Bill McRaven to provide him with files that were compiled by Kroll Associates, a firm retained in 2014 by the Board of Regents to investigate admissions abuses at UT-Austin. The firm provided a public report that avoided important details and resulted in minimal action to correct problems. Hall requested the files, but was denied access under a novel legal claim that federal student privacy laws prevent regents from reviewing certain university admissions files. This is despite the fact that the law has never been used to block oversight of an educational institution by its Board.

The case, which made its way to the state Supreme Court, will determine whether regents and other appointed fiduciaries of state agencies and institutions will have access to important records relating to the institutions they must monitor. Preventing a Supreme Court decision in the case will leave lower court rulings in place that allow state employees to withhold information from Board directors. It will also allow other allegations of abuses at UT-Austin that were not investigated to remain buried.

Expedited action to confirm the new regents will compromise the case because Hall’s six-year term on the Board of Regents expires upon confirmation of his replacement, at which time he may lose standing before the court. The lower courts granted expedited reviews in the case, and the Supreme Court also granted requests for expedited reviews in order to resolve the case before Hall’s term expires.

“It is clear that the Supreme Court has invested tremendous time and effort to consider the important issues in this case,” Hall stated. “It will be unfortunate if pressure by Governor Abbott preempts a ruling by the justices that could support pro-reform practices in our state institutions.”

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