

March 25, 2026

Governor J. Kevin Stitt
Oklahoma State Capitol
Oklahoma City, OK 73105

Members of the Oklahoma Senate
2300 N Lincoln Blvd.
Oklahoma City, OK 73105

Dear Governor Stitt and Oklahoma Senators,

We are writing on behalf of the undersigned organizations to urge you to support tenure at Oklahoma's institutions of higher education rather than eliminate it, as Executive Order 2026-07 and Senate Bill 1782 aim to do. We urge you to rescind the Executive Order, which eliminates tenure at the state's public regional universities and community colleges, and we strongly oppose SB 1782, which aims to end tenure at *all* public institutions of higher education in Oklahoma.

As stated in Executive Order 2026-07, the State of Oklahoma has a responsibility to steward Oklahoma tax dollars, ensure accountability in higher education, advance student knowledge, and shape the state's "civic and economic future." Contrary to the Executive Order and SB 1782, however, faculty tenure promotes—rather than undermines—these educational aims. Without tenure, faculty jobs in Oklahoma will be far less desirable than they are in other states, and Oklahoma colleges and universities will be less competitive in the market for outstanding faculty. Moreover, the faculty that remain in Oklahoma will not be able to teach as effectively, and faculties will be less invested in the success of their institutions. Without tenure, the quality of higher education institutions in Oklahoma—and the quality of the education they provide to Oklahoma's students—will deteriorate significantly.

The main purpose of tenure is to ensure that faculty have the academic freedom to research and teach according to their expertise without pressure or intrusion from corporations, political factions, or special interest groups. Tenure allows institutions to recruit and retain faculty from the broadest range of intellectual and political views, and ensures those faculty can teach and research effectively. Only if faculty are free to conduct classes in which students can engage with the full range of issues affecting human life and society will students learn the skills of critical thinking and civil discourse necessary for success in any workplace—as well as, more fundamentally, for a functioning democracy. Without the protections of tenure, faculty at Oklahoma's public institutions will be more hesitant to present challenging issues and views with which their students may disagree, and that does a serious disservice to their students and to the people of Oklahoma.

Tenure not only helps ensure the academic freedom of faculty and students' freedom to learn—it also gives faculty a deep stake in the success of the institutions they serve. The dedicated faculty culture that results from tenure enriches the broader communities in which colleges are situated. By granting tenure, an institution makes a long-term investment in the life's work of its faculty. As a result, faculty members are more invested in the mission of the institution, more dedicated to student success, and more connected to their communities. They bring that commitment into the classroom, and students then reap the benefits of learning from a committed, mission-driven teaching workforce. And not only that, but the higher stakes of decisions to grant tenure—rather than a terminal contract that will be revisited in a few years—require institutions to make careful, disciplined hiring and retention choices that promote faculty excellence.

Increasingly, students at regional universities and community colleges are enrolling in humanities classes that engage them in the kind of open-ended inquiry where these benefits of tenure for academic freedom

and faculty engagement are most important. A [recent article](#) in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* noted that the number of students who completed associate degrees in the liberal arts and humanities at community colleges increased by about 4.3 percent each year from 1987 to 2018, while degrees in vocational and professional fields declined. Moreover, students are [increasingly drawn to humanities classes](#) as a way to engage with bigger questions of meaning and purpose. The benefits of tenure are especially important for faculty in these classes, since humanities disciplines such as philosophy, history, and literature are where students and faculty are most likely to engage with challenging and controversial issues. Without tenure, it will be difficult for Oklahoma institutions to attract and retain professors with the talent, commitment, and professional security to engage with students on these important topics.

Even after faculty receive tenure, their performance is reviewed regularly. Tenured faculty who violate professional standards can be dismissed. Tenure does not, as some believe, release faculty from the responsibility to perform according to the highest expectations. Post-tenure reviews are serious, and negative evaluations have real consequences for a faculty member's position, including on salary, teaching, and relationships with administrators. The idea sometimes heard in political debates over tenure—that because tenured faculty cannot be removed without cause, faculty with tenure have no incentive to excel nor any penalty for failure—is simply false.

For all these reasons, we urge Governor Stitt to rescind Executive Order 2026-07 and all members of the Oklahoma Senate to oppose SB 1782. These measures do the students—and, in fact, all citizens—of Oklahoma a real disservice. Eliminating tenure will reduce Oklahoma's students' access to the kind of rigorous, meaningful search for truth that they so richly deserve. If students do not have the opportunity in the classroom to exercise their freedom to think and learn, and to consider topics from many different perspectives under the guidance of faculty who are committed to their success, they will not receive the robust education their institutions owe them. Moreover, without that high quality education, they will not have the same opportunities to move up the economic ladder available to students at institutions in other states. In addition, the critical thinking skills inculcated by a college education are crucial for producing an educated, engaged, and vibrant citizenry. Students at all of Oklahoma's institutions of higher education deserve the highest quality education possible, and tenure is a key foundation for that well-rounded and robust education. In the interest of the success of Oklahoma's colleges and universities and their faculties and students, we urge you to reconsider both Executive Order 2026-07 and Senate Bill 1782.

Signed,

American Philosophical Association
American Academy of Religion
American Society for Theatre Research
American Sociological Association
Association for Slavic, East European, and Eurasian Studies
International Center of Medieval Art
Latin American Studies Association
National Women's Studies Association
North American Conference on British Studies
Society of Architectural Historians
World History Association