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Standing Together in Support of Higher Education and the Legal Profession

Dear Friends,

Over the last month, we have seen the Trump administration target in unprecedented and escalating ways legal and educational institutions that are at the heart of our profession. Those governmental actions strike at the core of ordered liberty and threaten our freedoms of speech and association, the independence and impartiality of our courts, the right to counsel, due process, and the rule of law itself.

We write to underscore the seriousness of these actions, both individually and cumulatively, and why all lawyers and educators across the political and ideological spectrums should work together toward restoring our nation's commitments to fairness and good governance. While remaining mindful that each institution and its students, staff, faculty, administrators, and alumni have a range of political and ideological perspectives, we suggest several actions that should help to bolster the conditions in which law and education may continue to thrive.

The actions taken against universities are significant.¹ Last week, financial ratings agency [Moody's downgraded its outlook for colleges and universities](#) because of what the federal government has done. Universities in other parts of the world are seeing an uptick in applications from U.S.-based researchers, which has been described as a "[U.S. brain drain](#)."

The Trump Administration has also broadened its [campaign of retaliation](#) against the legal profession.² Over the last few weeks, [attacks on judges](#), [on law firms](#) (including [Covington & Burling](#), [Perkins Coie](#), and [Paul Weiss](#)), the [American Bar Association](#), and [lawyers associated](#) with the ABA have intensified. Late Friday night, President Trump directed Attorney General Bondi [to take steps against lawyers and law firms](#) that litigate against him, particularly singling out immigration lawyers for representing their clients. The U.S. Marshals Service has warned that [threats against judges have surged](#) as the administration has called to [punish and impeach](#) judges for [doing their jobs](#).

¹ The actions at issue include [dozens of investigations](#), targeting [foreign-born academics](#) and [international students](#), promises to [defund universities](#) that do not quash campus protests, [unlawful threats](#) to law schools, and the [dismantling of the Department of Education](#). They also include [freezing billions of dollars](#) in scientific and other research funding and [revoking millions](#) in grants and contracts (with prominent examples at [Columbia](#), [John Hopkins](#), and the [University of Pennsylvania](#)).

² Since assuming office, the President has [fired](#) government [lawyers](#) and [watchdogs](#), launched [broad investigations](#) of law firms, and issued [orders](#) designed to make it harder to oppose the administration even when there are concerns about the legality of its actions. At the same time, the administration has ignored

Taken together these actions seek to chill criticism, silence those who may seek to hold the executive branch accountable and intimidate lawyers. As [over one thousand attorneys in large law firms](#) have written, “Over the past several weeks, the Executive Branch has launched an all-out attack aimed at dismantling rule-of-law norms, including by censuring individual law firms by name because of past representation.” Of course, punishing lawyers for their lawful representation and advocacy is unconstitutional, violating the First Amendment and undermining the Sixth Amendment.

The independence of our universities and judiciary, and the ability of lawyers to fully represent their clients, are at the core of our democracy and have long been supported by all Americans, regardless of political party. Whether the policy ends are favored or not, the government must comply with the law. It is not a partisan matter to raise concerns that the methods by which the administration is threatening universities, the judiciary, and the legal profession [are unlawful](#) and [unconstitutional](#). More than a thousand law professors, who “have a variety of views on the underlying policies at issue” have explained in [a bi-partisan letter](#) how “[we are in a constitutional crisis](#).” Or, as [another commentator has written](#): “The result, if all goes through, will be nothing less than the permanent diminishment of research universities and an upheaval of the free speech principles at the core of the country.”

In the legal profession, [the fear of government retaliation](#) is palpable and dangerous. Lawyers must be able to continue their traditional role of representing the unpopular or politically powerless, who without representation would not have their day in court. Actions that target individuals and firms based on viewpoint [are also unlawful](#), constituting “unconstitutional viewpoint-based retaliation,” which violates “the right of freedom of association.” The judiciary must also be independent and free from intimidation so that it may properly hold the executive branch accountable when it violates the law. Nearly all judges believe [the public’s respect for judges has declined](#) as a result of the polarization. [Recent threats are particularly dangerous](#) and will only further erode trust in our judicial system.

To be clear, the concern is not a substantive disagreement over whether certain immigrants may be deported or have their statuses revoked, or whether protesters who broke laws can be charged and prosecuted, or whether certain universities should change policies, or whether judicial decisions can be disagreed with or criticized. Rather, the issue is whether the President and the executive branch can ignore existing laws, processes, and separation of powers that protect against arbitrary executive action without due process. At stake is the core of what it means to be a free society, of which universities and the legal profession are a critical part. Every American, regardless of political or ideological affiliation, is affected.

Joining Calls to Speak Out Against Intimidation

We ask for unity in insisting that the attacks on our courts, on the legal profession, on lawyers, and on our universities are wrong and must cease. We join [the American Bar Association](#) and [others](#) who have “call[ed] upon the entire profession, including lawyers who serve in elected positions, to speak out against intimidation.” We also join those who “call on the judiciary, bar associations, law firms, and individual lawyers to speak out against this dangerous assault on the legal profession and the rule of law.” We share the concerns of [hundreds of political scientists](#) who have expressed “urgent concern about threats to the basic design of American government and democracy.”

[long-standing precedent](#), reinterpreted [outdated laws](#) to expand executive authority, and “[taken dozens of actions that appear to violate federal statutes, the Constitution, or both](#).” Recently the administration appears to have [defied court orders](#).

We therefore encourage our member schools—but also other organizations in legal education and the legal profession—to join in nonpartisan ways to help educate the public before more harm occurs. Some steps schools may wish to consider:

- **Expanded Programming on the Rule of Law and Separation of Powers.** We applaud the Big 10 Academic Alliance Law Schools for hosting and streaming a [webinar series on the Rule of Law](#). We encourage others to offer similar programs and expand civic education, committing ourselves to open debate with a range of perspectives, but in a way that defends the courts and our legal system.
- **Public Support, Both Vocal and Quiet.** We encourage leaders and faculty to stand firm behind those who are pushing back on unlawful government action. Several college presidents have recently issued statements about the importance of university independence. We also recognize, however, that [quiet work behind the scenes](#) is equally important. This is a time to come together, to recognize that while we may be positioned differently, we all need to support core values and one another. We encourage law school leaders to reach out to their alumni who hold elective office at the state and federal level to discuss their community's concerns and urge action.
- **Support the Judiciary and the Bar.** We urge law schools to reach out to local judges, state courts, and local bar associations to ask them to help but also to provide them assistance. Judges must be able to do their jobs without fear of violence or undue influence. Leaders in the legal profession should continue to condemn attacks on judges for simply doing their jobs.
- **Explore Additional Mission-Aligned Collaborations.** We ask law schools to explore within their universities and communities additional mission-aligned collaborations that can help build broad coalitions and further support for the rule of law. Consider other departments and schools on campus, local justice-related organizations, faith-based initiatives that promote justice and human flourishing, labor organizations, and businesses that depend upon the rule of law to thrive.
- **Reach out to Visiting Scholars, Foreign-Born Scholars, and International Students.** Our foreign-born scholars and international students are particularly vulnerable. The administration appears no longer concerned with only unlawful immigration but seeks to punish foreign-born residents who are here lawfully but who express views critical of or different than the administration. We encourage schools to reach out and provide support.
- **Speak with Your Alumni.** Law schools should tell more stories about how law schools and universities matter and explain in real terms how recent government action will impact your communities. Law schools and universities have been essential for promoting public health, civic engagement, economic growth, and national security. Law schools provide critical services to low-income and needy individuals. Often universities are the largest employers in their regions. Many are engines of upward mobility for everyone in our society.

Actions that weaken law schools and universities, the legal profession, and the judiciary, hurt all Americans. The Association will continue to do its part to provide information to deans and others during webinars, Deans Dialogues, and other events. We will continue to support organizations that seek to protect the integrity and functioning of our universities, our law schools, and the legal profession. We have included below a list of some statements and recent analysis of the actions of the administration against law and higher education and the harm those actions will cause.

The volume and unprecedented nature of these actions have understandably left many of us feeling overwhelmed. The Association condemns in the strongest possible terms actions by the government aimed at chilling the profession and undermining the judiciary and our universities. We urge our law schools to stand together behind core values that support the rule of law and our constitutional order.

Sincerely,



Austen Parrish
President, Association of American Law Schools



Danielle M. Conway
President Elect, Association of American Law Schools



Melanie Wilson
Immediate Past President, Association of American Law Schools



Kellye Y. Testy
Executive Director and CEO, Association of American Law Schools

RESOURCES

Statements

- Statement of Law Professors and Law Teachers, [*We Are in a Constitutional Crisis*](#), February 2025 (statement signed by more than 1,000 law professors).
- ABA, [*ABA Condemns Remarks Questioning Legitimacy of Courts and Judicial Review*](#), February 11, 2025.
- Political Scientists' Statement, [*Threats to the Basic Design of American Government and Democracy*](#), February 22, 2025 (statement signed by over 1200 political scientists).
- American College of Trial Lawyers, [*ACTL Condemns Elon Musk's Call for an Immediate Wave of Judicial Impeachments*](#), February 25, 2025.
- AALS, [*Statement of the Association of American Law Schools on Executive Branch Compliance with Court Orders*](#), February 27, 2025.
- The American Bar Association, [*The ABA Rejects Efforts to Undermine the Courts and the Legal Profession*](#), March 3, 2025.
- American College of Trial Lawyers, [*ACTL Opposes Government Retaliation Against Lawyers for Representing Clients*](#), March 7, 2025.
- Jonathan R. Cole, [*Columbia's Capitulation Will Hurt Us All*](#), The New York Times, March 24, 2025.
- Knight Institute, [*Knight Institute Condemns Trump Administration's Effort to "Subjugate Universities to Official Power."*](#) March 14, 2025.
- International Lawyers Associations, [*Recent Targeting of Legal Professionals by the US Government \(Joint Statement\)*](#), March 18, 2025 (A group of 18 bar societies and law associations across the world condemning "the recent actions by the US government targeting legal professionals at both the international and domestic levels, which violate international human rights law and undermine the rule of law").
- American Constitution Society, [*Let's Stand Together to Defend the Rule of Law*](#), March 18, 2025.
- The Federal Bar Association, [*Statement on an Independent Judiciary*](#), March 19, 2025 (reaffirming "its nonpartisan commitment to the independence of the judiciary and the rule of law" and joining the statement of Chief Justice Roberts).
- AAUP Chapters, [*Joint Statement of AAUP Chapters Regarding the Ongoing Crisis at Columbia University*](#), March 20, 2025.
- Federation of Law Societies of Canada, [*Statement on Threats to the Rule of Law, the Independence of the Bar and Judicial Independence in the United States*](#), March 21, 2025.
- [*Nearly Two Dozen Leading Civil Rights Groups Condemn Trump Administration Memo Threatening Lawyers and Law Firms That Bring Suits Against the Federal Government*](#), March 22, 2025 (call of twenty-two civil rights organizations to defend the rule of law).
- Democracy Forward, [*Democracy Forward Issues Statement Regarding President Trump's Targeting of Lawyers and Legal Profession*](#), March 22, 2025.

- [*Open Letter Condemning Dismantling of Rule-of-Law Norms*](#), Big Law Associates, March 23, 2025 (over 1300 associates of large law firms condemning attacks on the legal profession and the rule of law).
- [*Open Letter in Response to Federal Funding Cuts at Columbia*](#), Jewish Faculty, Scholars, and Students at U.S. Universities, March 23, 2025 (signed by over five hundred faculty, scholars, and students on how “harming U.S. Universities does not protect Jewish people”).

Analysis and Opinion

- Evan Goldstein and Len Gutkin, [*‘We’re in the Midst of an Authoritarian Takeover’ Lee Bollinger on Trump, Columbia, and Why Capitulation Won’t Work*](#), The Chronicle of Higher Education, March 11, 2025.
- Kate Andrias *et al.*, [*A Title VI Demand Letter That Itself Violates Title VI \(and the Constitution\)*](#), Balkanization, March 15, 2025 (scholars of constitutional law, administrative law, and antidiscrimination law explaining how the demands of Columbia University are unlawful).
- Meghan O’Rourke, [*The End of the University as We Know It*](#), New York Times, March 16, 2025.
- Christopher L. Eisgruber, [*The Cost of the Government’s Attack on Columbia*](#), The Atlantic, March 19, 2025.
- Eugene Volokh *et al.*, [*A Statement from Constitutional Law Scholars on Columbia*](#), The New York Review, March 20, 2025 (eighteen constitutional law scholars from across the ideological spectrum explaining how “the government may not threaten funding cuts as a tool to pressure recipients into suppressing First Amendment–protected speech”).
- American Association of University Professors, [*Political Attacks on Higher Education*](#) (resources and list of events).