

Joint Union Statement on the House Committee Attacks on Campus Free Speech

Members of our unions—which represent tens of thousands of educators and researchers at Rutgers University, Northwestern University, the University of California, and other campuses—will be present at a congressional hearing this Thursday, May 23, at which officials from our universities have been summoned to testify before the House Committee on Education and the Workforce.

We believe this hearing and previous actions of the Committee represent an attack on the foundations of higher education and are part of a wider extremist effort to stifle and curtail freedom of speech, freedom of assembly, and freedom of expression throughout society. Defending our universities at this moment is necessary to defend the basic principles of US democracy.

We believe the protests on our campuses this spring fall squarely within the traditions of free speech and academic freedom. Academic freedom is essential to our public universities, and our unions are committed to protecting that freedom for everyone in the university community. Curbs on academic freedom carried out to serve a political agenda are deeply harmful, as we learned from the McCarthy era in the last century.

The Committee's inquiries are carried out on the premise that there is a pervasive climate of antisemitism at our universities. As faculty members and graduate workers who teach and work every day on our campuses and who are closely engaged with students from many diverse backgrounds, we reject this characterization. The Committee is not interested in the truth but in inflaming the culture wars and delegitimizing higher education.

Colleges and universities are not immune from antisemitism, but many of the examples of bias identified by the Committee are either criticisms of the Israeli government and/or expressions of solidarity with the Palestinian people. We reject the idea that either of these is antisemitic in and of themselves. And we work hard to combat hate and to create safe environments for our campus communities.

Our students have a right to peaceful protest, and at public universities, they have the protections of the First Amendment. We reject the depiction of the protests on our campuses as "lawless." We defend the agreements reached by officials at Rutgers and Northwestern that granted some demands of the protesters. We wish this commitment to finding a peaceful resolution had existed at other campuses that instead resorted to violent repression, as at UCLA.

We urge the Committee and the public to listen to the people who work and study on our campuses, whose experiences reflect the actual threats to public universities coming from decades of declining funding and a long-term conservative offensive against higher education. We embrace a shared objective of robust discussion on our campuses to help all students arrive

at a deeper and fuller understanding of our society and our world. That is the goal of higher education, and it is why we will be present in Washington on May 23.

Signed by:

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