

November 20, 2023

To: President Liz Magill
CC: Provost John Jackson
Larry Jameson, Dean, Perelman School of Medicine
Steven Fluharty, Dean, School of Arts and Sciences
Tulia Falleti, Chair, Faculty Senate
Marietta Ambrose, Chair, Medical Faculty Senate
Lisa Bellini, Chair, Committee on Open Expression

Dear Colleagues,

It has been three weeks since we sent you our [Statement on Threats to Academic Freedom, University Governance, and Safety at the University of Pennsylvania](#). Despite the administration's [comment to the *Daily Pennsylvanian* that meeting with AAUP–Penn would be a “first step.”](#) we have received no reply from you.

In the interim, we have continued to receive reports of targeted harassment of faculty members that require public condemnation from the university administration. Dozens of faculty and students have reported being subjected to targeted harassment and threats of personal violence for publicly criticizing Israeli government policies and expressing solidarity with Palestinians. This harassment appears to be organized and systematic, fueled by such organizations as Canary Mission and the far-right social media account LibsOfTikTok, among others. Social media posts and petitions have called for the firing of professors and have spread misinformation that defames some of our colleagues as antisemites and apologists for terrorism. Some of our students have been doxxed. These examples of targeted harassment threaten the safety of our community. They also threaten the academic freedom of all faculty members, as they exert a chilling effect on protected extramural speech.

The national AAUP's position is clear: **“The AAUP urges administrations, governing boards, and faculties, individually and collectively, to speak out clearly and forcefully to defend academic freedom and to condemn targeted harassment and intimidation of faculty members.”**

Rather than condemn targeted harassment, it appears that the University's leadership has contributed to the problem. President Magill has continued to issue statements that associate antisemitism with an overly broad range of political speech, [and has begun issuing public condemnations of political expression by members of the University who have criticized Israeli government policy](#), called for changes in Penn's investments, and expressed support for Palestinians. Indeed, President Magill's November 10 message disturbingly characterizes antiwar statements and criticism of the Israeli state as “acts of hate.” Further, in referring to “emails threatening violence to individuals purely based on their Jewish and other identities” (and declining to name what “other identities” are in question), that message not only fails to condemn the overwhelming volume of threats specifically against Palestinian, Arab, and Muslim

faculty and students and those who support them; it also effectively implies that they are themselves the threat in the University's view.

The fundamental duty of the University administration in a time of war and political conflict is to protect academic freedom. That means reminding the Penn community and the wider public in clear, unequivocal terms that **faculty members' extramural speech is protected, that institutional policies on open expression will be upheld, and that harassment will not be tolerated.**

We share with you [guidance for administrators](#) from [Faculty First Responders](#), a resource created by scholars who have studied targeted harassment as one key element of organized attacks on higher education in recent years. This website was created with support from the national AAUP. We also share the AAUP national statement of November 15, "[Polarizing Times Demand Robust Academic Freedom](#)," which specifically rejects the definition of pro-Palestinian speech as inherently antisemitic and correctly frames the situation at Penn and on many campuses: "By acceding to external political pressures and demands for political censorship instead of encouraging the utmost freedom of discussion, college and university administrations abandon their own responsibility for protecting the academic community's central mission of education, research, and service to the broader society and to the public good. **Administrators who claim to defend academic freedom and then condemn the content of faculty and student speech and expression that it should protect risk chilling speech and expression and eroding the very academic freedom that they claim to protect.**" As their statement reminds us all, "College and university leaders have no obligation to speak out on the most controversial issues of the day. Their duty is to protect the academic freedom, free speech, and associational rights of faculty and students to speak on all topics of public or political interest without fear of intimidation, retaliation, or punishment."

We ask that the University administration issue a clear, public statement condemning targeted harassment and intimidation of faculty members. Given the systematic nature of this harassment, it is important for such a statement to note explicitly that faculty are being harassed and personally threatened for speech that is critical of Israeli government policies and supportive of Palestinians. In the absence of such a statement, the administration is already sending a message that it implicitly condones these threats to our colleagues and will only protect the speech and safety of those who support Israel's war on Gaza. **We further ask for an explanation of what you plan to do beyond issuing a statement to respond to the harassment of faculty.** In the meantime, we are consulting with legal counsel as well as with the AAUP national office as we pursue the necessary steps to protect our colleagues.

Sincerely,

AAUP-Penn Executive Committee