

Chair Grace Speights  
Board of Trustees  
The George Washington University  
2121 I St NW  
Washington, DC 20052

May 8, 2024

Dear Chair Speights:

We are parents of some of the students who supported a peaceful, anti-genocide protest at The George Washington University from April 25, 2024 until a police raid on May 8, 2024. We write to express our deep concern about the dangerously ineffective ways in which President Ellen Granberg and Provost Christopher Alan Bracey have responded to this ongoing conflict. We are also calling for the Board of Trustees to secure their resignations and take other important steps.

We want to first note that we stand in full solidarity with the students who risked their education, careers, and safety in order to peacefully exercise their First Amendment rights, oppose the Israeli government's ongoing genocidal war crimes in Gaza, and call on their university to disclose and divest from any financial support for human rights abuses. These students followed the legacy of young people who used peaceful civil disobedience to protest segregation, the Vietnam War, and apartheid, and we applaud their courage.

Instead of treating these students with respect, President Granberg and Provost Bracey spent weeks ignoring, defaming and endangering our children and other students participating in this peaceful protest. President Granberg refused to meet or negotiate with students (and then she falsely claimed that non-existent negotiations had failed), suspended students without due process or justification, and apparently turned a blind eye to Provost Bracey's alleged physical assault of a student (on April 29<sup>th</sup>, Provost Bracey came to the protest and was [caught on video](#) appearing to physically attack a woman who was filming an interaction with him, knocking down a camera she was holding).

The current administration's botched response culminated in the unnecessary and dangerous police raid on GW students on the morning of May 8<sup>th</sup>. For the reasons outlined below, we demand the Board of Trustees condemn this reckless behavior, terminate President Granberg and Provost Bracey, and take the following additional steps:

- Call on the DC police to release all students arrested for peacefully protesting and drop charges against them.
- Direct new school leadership to directly engage with concerned students, listen to their concerns, and negotiate a resolution that addresses their legitimate concerns.
- Protect free speech on campus, including speech in favor of Palestinian human rights, and allow students to engage in peaceful civil disobedience without facing police violence.
- Reverse the suspensions of students suspended for peacefully protesting and enable them to make up for the final tests they may have missed as a reason of GW's misguided actions.
- Enable all protesting students to make up for the final tests they may have missed as a reason of GW's refusal to allow students to enter and exit the encampment.
- Transparently disclose all endowments and financial investments to then public.
- End any financial ties or partnerships with foreign governments or companies involved in human rights abuses, including the Israeli government, which is currently being tried for a "plausible" charge of genocide at the International Court of Justice.

Thank you for your attention to these urgent requests. Please read the following letter for a more detailed description of the facts and our concerns. Please contact Hala Amer at [amerhala@outlook.com](mailto:amerhala@outlook.com) if you have questions.

Sincerely,

Concerned Parents of Students at The George Washington University

**(NOTE: TO PROTECT THE PRIVACY OF PARENTS, THE NAMES OF SIGNING PARENTS HAVE BEEN REDACTED FROM THIS PUBLIC VERSION OF LETTER BEING SHARED WITH MEDIA AND OTHER MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC)**

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## **GW Parents Condemn University President and Provost Ignoring, Defaming and Endangering Peaceful Student Protesters, and Call for the Board of Trustees to Secure Their Resignations**

We are 79 parents of students who supported a peaceful, anti-genocide protest at The George Washington University from April 25, 2024 until a police raid on May 8, 2024. We write to express our deep concern about the dangerously ineffective ways in which President Ellen Granberg and Provost Christopher Alan Bracey have responded to this ongoing conflict. We are also calling for the Board of Trustees to secure their resignations and take other important steps.

We want to first note that we stand in full solidarity with the students who risked their education, careers, and safety in order to peacefully exercise their First Amendment rights, oppose the Israeli government's ongoing genocidal war crimes in Gaza, and call on their university to disclose and divest from any financial support for human rights abuses. These students followed the legacy of young people who used peaceful civil disobedience to protest segregation, the Vietnam War, and apartheid, and we applaud their courage.

When our children considered which university to attend, we encouraged them to choose The George Washington University as their second home in order to get the best education possible in the best environment possible, the heart of our nation's capital. The GW administration strongly highlighted its support for diversity, free speech, and activism, but the administration's disgraceful response to this peaceful anti-genocide protest shows that those words were mere lip service.

As we discuss in this letter, President Granberg and Provost Bracey have ignored, defamed and endangered students participating in this peaceful protest. The current administration's botched response culminated in the unnecessary and dangerous police raid on GW students on the morning of May 8<sup>th</sup>.

We are deeply disturbed by President Granberg's actions: encouraging the DC Police Department to raid the encampment, refusing to meet and negotiate a resolution with protesting students (and then falsely claiming that non-existent negotiations have failed), defaming students with false allegations, suspending students without justification, and turning a blind eye to Provost Bracey's apparent physical assault of a student (on April 29<sup>th</sup>, Provost Bracey came to the protest and was caught on video appearing to physically attack a female demonstrator, knocking down a camera she was holding).

As parents of GW students, we know that the diverse gathering of peaceful students at the encampment posed no threat to anyone, and their actions caused no violence to anyone.

Contrary to the claims of President Granberg, the only instances of physical conflict reported at the scene have occurred due to GWPD, outside agitators and, ironically, Provost Bracey himself. The only other dangerous threat reported at the scene was an officer recklessly pulling out a knife in a large crowd to cut the rope of a flag in recent days.

As parents, we are fed up. We have witnessed the mistreatment and repression of students, double standards, and hypocrisy that endanger students nationwide, including at GW. We trusted President Granberg and Provost Bracey to lead the campus where we send the most precious part of our lives: our children.

We have given the university leadership ample chances to correct its approach since the beginning of this conflict overseas, but their insistence on a shameful response has caused us to give up on the university leadership. President Granberg and Provost Bracey have lost our trust in their leadership, and we no longer have faith in their promises to treat students with the highest respect and protect free speech.

The facts are clear. After 7:00 P.M on Thursday April 25th, 2024, GW President Ellen Granberg requested that the DC metropolitan police intervene to, according to The Washington Post, 'sweep out the University protesters' without even trying to meet and negotiate with students. The DC metropolitan police refused this request.

Considering the brutal crackdown on First Amendment demonstrations that have occurred at other colleges throughout the nation, it is quite shocking to us that the restraint in this situation actually came from the metropolitan police, and not the university administration—who, we believe, should be the most committed to the students.

On Friday April 26th, at about 7:00 A.M, the university police barricaded the students on the U-Yard and enclosed them with metal barricades from all sides at the request of the administration. As a result of this, students inside the barricade were denied access to a restroom, running water, and medics, creating a serious health and safety hazard for the students inside.

These are only a few examples of the bargaining chips used by the administration to force the students to give up their demands and leave the protest. As of May 4th, 2024, President Granberg had refused to meet with a negotiating team of students who have extended their hand to communicate with their president in good faith, which is exemplary on their part. Instead, she again called on the police to attack students. In doing so, President Granberg let her own students down.

We, the parents, are extremely disgusted and furious at this hostile and irresponsible way of handling students who pay tens of thousands of dollars a year to have access to an open, scholarly community of the highest academic and moral standards.

In addition, President Granberg—who, again, refused to negotiate with the protesting students—decided to indefinitely suspend eight GW students who participated in this protest. The notion that our own children could be suspended without due process for engaging in peaceful protest is deeply disturbing.

This environment in which a school administration dangles the education and careers of our children as bargaining chips to strike fear and deter students from voicing their opinions, is not the one we encouraged our children to join.

These suspensions have hurt not only the education and careers of the affected students but have also jeopardized their wellbeing, health, and safety by suddenly revoking their housing and enabling conditions for food insecurity of the students. Some of those students may be coming from other states and pay for and rely on the university to provide them with campus housing. Students who risk all this to exercise their freedom of assembly and expression peacefully should be celebrated, instead of being evicted and barred from their campus and housing, regardless of whether the administration agrees with their views or not. It's time that the administration proves its dedication to its students above anything else.

This is a testing time for the nation, and The George Washington University needs to step up and fulfill its mission. GW should serve as the model for respectful engagement, free speech, and political activism, as it is located at the center of political action in our nation's capital, GW should be a beacon of free speech and political discourse instead of ignoring, defaming, and endangering students who engage in this country's long-standing tradition of peaceful civil disobedience. It is the responsibility of GW's leadership to make sure that they treat their students with the highest degree of respect, that political opinion is encouraged, not repressed and that no student is smeared or silenced for speaking their mind.

This is not the time to demonize and fight against the students. The students are not the enemy. When the students speak up, they should be encouraged, and their voices should be heard by the administration. In a scholarly institution of such prestige like GW, we expect the administration to work with the students first, and exhaust communication with them as much as possible before even considering turning to the DC metropolitan police to break up a peaceful protest.

We see a pattern in how trailblazers for change are perceived and repressed. The civil rights giants in Martin Luther King Jr, Malcolm X, and Rosa Parks, just to name a few, were painted as terrorists for challenging the status quo, and now the university and the nation holds them to the highest regard. Similarly, we see a parallel between the current protests against the war in Gaza, and the protests against the Vietnam war in the 70s, Apartheid in South Africa in the 90s, and Iraq war in the 2000', all of which took a spotlight on college campuses, including GW.

Some of those students who participated in the anti-Vietnam war protests paid the ultimate price of their lives for that cause. Now, 50 years later, they are hailed as heroes, despite being vilified at the time. GW, which was one of the few universities to divest from South African Apartheid, now takes credit for the anti-apartheid divestment protests that happened on its campus.

We find it hard to understand why this administration has not learned from the numerous lessons of its own history, as well as our nation's history. It's not enough to pay lip service to those inflection points in our nation's history and claim to support political freedom. It's time to apply for those lessons today.

The students at GW peacefully assembled, just as the protestors against the Vietnam and Iraq wars did. The administration should have respected their rights, but failed to do so.

We therefore demand The George Washington University's Board of Trustees demand the resignations of President Granberg and Provost Bracey, protect the rights of our children to peaceful demonstration, and negotiate with students in good faith to address their rightful concerns, just as other universities have recently done.

It is important to meet with, listen to, and consider the reasonable demands of students: reversing suspensions of students, transparently sharing requested information its investments, and ending any financial ties to foreign governments and companies involved in human rights abuses, including the Israeli government, which is currently facing "plausible" charges of genocide at the International Court of Justice.

As parents of students who pay tuition to GW, it is also our right to know where our money is going, and we have a say in how our money is invested. It should not be difficult for GW to—at the very least—be financially transparent about its investments, and it is disturbing that the current administration would rather suspend and smear its own students than disclose those investments.

This must change.

We look forward to a positive response from the Board of Trustees as soon as possible. Please contact Hala Amer at [amerhala@outlook.com](mailto:amerhala@outlook.com) with any questions.

Sincerely,

Concerned Parents of Students at The George Washington University

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