

Broad Coalition of Faculty, Staff, Students, and Unions Unite to Defend University of California System From Trump-Vance Administration Assault

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Lawsuit Challenges Administration's Intimidation and Targeting of Higher Education

San Francisco, CA – A broad coalition of faculty, staff, students, and labor unions today filed a lawsuit in the U.S. District Court for the Northern District of California, seeking to stop the Trump-Vance administration's attempt to unlawfully stifle free speech within the University of California (UC) system, the second largest employer in California. The massive coalition of labor unions representing workers throughout the nation, as well as those with members directly affected by the administration's unlawful attack on free speech, is represented in the matter by Democracy Forward and Altshuler Berzon LLP.

"In America, there is no king. Under our Constitution, the President cannot force people to think like he does, believe like he does, nor be exposed to only the ideas he agrees with. Yet, he's trying to do just that. The Trump-Vance administration's attempt to stop students, faculty, and staff at UC campuses from exercising their First Amendment rights and to unlawfully seek to intimidate educational institutions is a callous dismissal of one of the most important pillars of our democracy," said **Skye Perryman, President and CEO of Democracy Forward**. "On the week that the Constitution was signed 238 years ago, we are honored to represent this powerful coalition of working people, who have come together to defend free speech and challenge this unlawful march toward autocracy."

The coalition includes the American Association of University Professors (AAUP), American Federation of Teachers (AFT) and University Council–American Federation of Teachers, American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) Local 3299, the California Nurses Association (CNA)/National Nurses United (NNA), Teamsters Local 2010, International Union, United Automobile, Aerospace and Agricultural Implement Workers America (UAW) and UAW Local 4811, the University Professional and Technical Employee

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Communication Workers of America (UPTE), Council of UC Faculty Associations and campus-specific Faculty Associations (UCFAs) comprised of the Berkeley Faculty Association, Davis Faculty Association, Irvine Faculty Association, Riverside Faculty Association, San Diego Faculty Association, Santa Cruz Faculty Association, UC Merced Faculty Association, UC Santa Barbara Faculty Association, UCSF Faculty Association, and University of California Los Angeles Faculty Association.

The case is *American Association of University Professors et al v. Trump et al* and the coalition is asking the court to block the Trump-Vance administration from further use of financial threats to coerce the UC system to accede to demands that will harm faculty, staff, and students, in violation of the Constitution and existing law.

The Trump-Vance administration has attempted to implement a playbook to threaten colleges and universities based on a disdain for and disagreement with the content of those institutions' curriculum, the nature and content of the expressive activity that has taken place at those institutions, and diversity, equity, and inclusion programs and initiatives.

This effort expanded to the UC system at the end of July 2025, when the administration used reports of antisemitism in protests on a UC campus, and vague and unsupported allegations that UC was discriminating by using "proxies" for race in college admissions and transgender-inclusive policies, as justification to cancel almost \$600 million in research grants to a UC campus. That was followed on August 8, 2025, by a demand letter insisting that the UC system cede control to the federal government and to a government-appointed monitor over certain curriculum, faculty hiring and promotion decisions, adopt new protest restrictions and other restrictions on speech, agree to the disclosure of certain student disciplinary records, eliminate "diversity, equity, and inclusion" efforts, end gender-inclusive policies as relates to restrooms and other private spaces, and ban its medical centers from providing gender-affirming care to minors, among other policy changes that, if adopted, would violate the constitutional and state law rights of faculty, students, and staff. On top of these policy demands, the administration is demanding that the UC pay at least \$1 billion to the federal government, despite no legal basis for imposing any such fine.

"We will not stand by as the Trump administration destroys one of the largest public university higher education systems in the country and bludgeons academic freedom at the University of California, the heart of the revered free speech movement," said **AAUP President Todd Wolfson**. "In this historic lawsuit, faculty, students, and staff walk together to fight the authoritarian takeover of our universities. We stand hand in hand to protect not only our individual rights to free expression, debate, and association, but also to safeguard the health, safety, and economic mobility of our communities – all of which is at risk."

"Let's be clear: we should tackle antisemitism and other acts of hate and discrimination. But these illegal demands on the University of California are intended to punish an esteemed

institution by crippling economic opportunity and hindering the open pursuit of knowledge—the core purpose of our colleges and universities,” said **AFT President Randi Weingarten**. “It will not eradicate antisemitism, it will make things worse for Jewish students by making things worse for everyone. Today, we reject this attempt to silence free speech and resolve to challenge the Trump administration’s actions until they are rescinded.”

“This isn’t about antisemitism, it’s about banning gender-affirming care at UC hospitals, firing tenured faculty, exerting federal control over the content of UC teaching and research, and the permanent loss of jobs for many contingent faculty and staff,” said **CUCFA President Annie McClanahan**. “More broadly, it’s about an attempt to dismantle California’s third-largest employer—and an attack on the economy and future of the state. CUCFA, AAUP, and the UC unions realized it was vital to take action together to defend the UC and our core values from the Trump administration.” “The federal government’s demands are attempts to resegregate our universities, to banish non-citizens and gender non-conforming people from public life, to suppress free speech, to silence pro-Palestinian activism, and to supersede shared governance on our campuses—potentially undermining our collective bargaining rights,” said **UC-AFT President Katie Rodger**.

“UC-AFT remains resolute that the University of California should concede nothing to these demands.” “UCLA-FA is honored to stand with this coalition, which presents as an important reminder of what the UC really is— the people who day in and day out do the work on UC campuses,” said **UCLA Faculty Association Executive Board President Anna Markowitz**. “Today, we join the people of the UC in standing up against federal extortion, job loss, bans on speech and expression— against any effort to dismantle core public values that have made the UC great.”

“Agreeing to this settlement would be devastating for researchers, healthcare workers, and the whole UC community,” said **Ursula Quinn, Occupational Therapist at UCLA and a member of University Professional and Technical Employees (UPTE-CWA 9119)**. “We work every day to provide care and lifesaving treatment to people in our communities. We’re already understaffed and under-resourced. Surrendering this money to Trump would send a terrible moral signal to people who work here and could trickle down to impact patient care. The University of California is a world-class public institution. We are standing up for the institution and hope that the UC will join us!”

“The Trump administration’s blatantly unconstitutional efforts to extort the University of California system aren’t just an anathema to the protections guaranteed by the Bill of Rights, but the pursuit of knowledge, inclusion and innovation that have made UC hospitals, research facilities, and campuses the envy of the world,” said **AFSCME 3299 President Michael Avant**. “Worse, it has created a climate of fear and uncertainty for UC students, patients and staff who can no longer go to work, speak their minds, seek care, or enforce their rights on the job without fear of reprisals from masked federal agents or a vengeful, lawless President.”

“Nurses know that gender-affirming care is safe and effective. Blocking coverage for potentially life-saving care will cause direct and immediate harm to trans patients. We never want to put our patients at risk. Trans care is health care. Hospitals are a place of healing. That’s why we also say ICE has no place there,” said **Sandy Reding, RN, CNA/NNU president.**

“Teamsters Local 2010 will always fight to defend the jobs and rights of our members, and all working people. The Administration’s extortionate lawsuit and multimillion dollar funding cuts threaten every one of the 20,000 Teamster jobs at University of California. The Administration’s attempt to limit free speech on campus threatens our fundamental rights as workers to picket, strike, rally, and join together in union. Through this lawsuit, we stand with all UC unions to stand up for public higher education and the workers who make it work every day,” said **Jason Rabinowitz, Secretary-Treasurer, Teamsters Local 2010.**

Read the complaint filed today here.

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Democracy Forward Foundation is a national legal organization that advances democracy and social progress through litigation, policy, public education, and regulatory engagement. For more information, please visit www.democracyforward.org.

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