

[Northwestern Concerned Faculty Group](#)

July 29, 2025

As recently [reported](#), Northwestern will likely be pressured to reach a “deal” with the Trump administration to release the approximately [\\$790 million in federal funds](#) currently withheld from the University, allegedly because it has fostered antisemitism.

Last week, Columbia University agreed to pay the administration more than \$200 million and consented to various forms of surveillance in exchange for the government restarting frozen research funding. The Trump administration has made clear that it expects to follow a similar course with other universities.

We call on Northwestern’s leadership to resist the administration’s attack on fundamental democratic principles by refusing to “make a deal” with the administration.

Acquiescence to the administration’s tactics would make Northwestern complicit in an assault on higher education, which is an essential bulwark of civil society. The administration is skirting legal processes and demanding what amounts to ransom from universities; such actions continue its well-documented and dangerous abuse of executive power.

The funds withheld by the executive branch were appropriated by Congress. In withholding them, the Trump administration defies the constitutional separation of powers, federal statutes, First Amendment protections of free speech and longstanding principles of academic freedom.

These laws and norms are essential to democracy, and we implore Northwestern to defend them.

American colleges and universities are world-renowned as champions of free inquiry. They generate new knowledge, jobs, wealth and upward mobility. They are places where people debate ideas and take risks that are often rewarded by advances in science, medicine, public policy, history, literature and the arts that enhance our collective well being. They train future generations to navigate a complex world.

We must now fight to preserve the autonomy and integrity of these vital institutions against an administration that seeks to force them into conformity with its own preferred political views.

We know that some university leaders hope to protect the future of higher education by negotiating agreements with the Trump administration. We too wish to protect the important work of colleges and universities — where faculty teach students, conduct and publish ground-breaking research, and produce

music, art and literature.

But consenting to an agreement like Columbia's will weaken Northwestern and fail to prevent future interference in our mission. In short, it will violate the fiduciary responsibility of Northwestern's leadership. The way forward is to not give in to the lawlessness of the Trump administration — it is to stand up for American institutions of higher education.

The Trump administration justifies its attacks on Northwestern by alleging that the University has violated antidiscrimination laws in fostering antisemitism. We oppose antisemitism in all of its forms. We also join with [more than one hundred](#) Jewish faculty and staff at Northwestern in rejecting the notion that there is a widespread crisis of antisemitism on our campus.

Antisemitism, like other forms of racism and exclusion, exists and must be addressed. But the federal government's current campaign — withholding research funds; interfering with academic programming, personnel decisions and student services; and imposing congressional hearings, surveillance, detention and censorship — is not aimed at protecting Jewish students or faculty.

Rather, the administration aims to silence speech that is critical of the actions of the state of Israel or

critical of U.S. support for the destruction and dispossession of the Palestinian people. More generally the administration aims to use its power, unjustly and illegally, to attack people and organizations it perceives as political opponents.

The Trump administration has already shown it cannot be trusted to act in good faith. It will not stop with Northwestern, just as it did not stop with Columbia. Conceding to its demands may not stop its attacks on Northwestern's independence and will certainly embolden further attacks on colleges and universities.

We urge President Schill, members of the Board of Trustees and others in positions of leadership at Northwestern to refuse the Trump administration's call to "make a deal." Instead, principled leadership must defend academic freedom, protect political dissent and resist participating in federal efforts to chill speech, punish protest and weaponize antisemitism for political ends.

Written by and signed,

The Northwestern Concerned Faculty Group

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