



AMERICAN CIVIL LIBERTIES UNION

Hawai'i

MEDIA RELEASE

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Following Trump Administration Threats, ACLU Sends Letter of Support to Universities in Hawai'i, Urging Them to Protect Campus Speech

Guidance Following White House Actions Targeting Dissent

HONOLULU, HI — The American Civil Liberties Union (“ACLU”) of Hawai'i today sent guidance to the University of Hawai'i urging it to reject any federal pressure to surveil or punish international students and faculty based on constitutionally protected speech.

This [letter](#), authored by ACLU National, is prompted by two executive orders — Executive Order 14161, titled “Protecting the United States from Foreign Terrorists and other National Security and Public Safety Threats” signed on Jan. 20, 2025, and Executive Order 14188, titled “Additional Measures to Combat Anti-Semitism,” signed on Jan. 29, 2025 — and related communications from the White House.

The guidance is especially timely after a Truth Social post from President Trump threatening to stop federal funding for “any College, School, or University that allow[s] illegal protests,” and proposing that “agitators will be imprisoned/or permanently sent back to the country from which they came.”

“The U.S. government is threatening to crack down on students, faculty, and staff for speaking their minds in the academy – the very space that is meant to be a safe haven for the free exchange of ideas and robust debates,” said **Salmah Rizvi, Executive Director of the ACLU of Hawai'i**. “The University of Hawai'i should reject the Trump administration’s attempted censorship of students and faculty and hold firm against any attempt to punish members of their communities for their beliefs.”

According to the ACLU, the White House is attempting to pressure university officials to target immigrant and international students, faculty, and staff, including holders of non-immigrant visas and lawful permanent residents or others on a path to U.S. citizenship, for exercising their First Amendment rights. The letter outlines four key principles universities should adhere to when addressing campus speech:

- Universities should encourage robust discussion and exploration of ideas by students, faculty, and staff, regardless of their nationality or immigration status.
- Nothing obligates universities to act as deputies in immigration law enforcement – to the contrary, universities do not and should not veer so far from their core mission for good reasons.
- Schools must protect the privacy of all students, including immigrant and international students.
- Schools must abide by the 14th Amendment and Title VI of the Civil Rights Act.

“The right to free speech exists for a reason, and we all need to stand fast against threats to our fundamental rights,” said **Emily Hills, Senior Staff Attorney of the ACLU of Hawai‘i**. “Just as the federal government cannot coerce Hawai‘i into violating federal constitutional rights, it also cannot force Hawai‘i schools to violate our state constitution.” [Article I, Section 4](#) of the Hawai‘i Constitution protects the freedom of speech and assembly, and [Article I, Section 6](#) protects the people’s right to privacy, including a prohibition against state disclosure of personal information.

This is the fourth set of guidance from the ACLU to universities since 2023. Dozens of ACLU affiliates have taken legal action, distributed campus know-your-rights materials, or issued additional guidance related to protest on campuses, [including ACLU-HI](#).

“It is disturbing to see the White House threatening freedom of speech and academic freedom on U.S. college campuses so blatantly. We stand in solidarity with university leaders in their commitment to free speech, open debate, and peaceful dissent on campus,” said **Cecilia Wang, Legal Director of ACLU National** and co-author of the letter. “Trump’s latest coercion campaign, attempting to turn university administrators against their own students and faculty, harkens back to the McCarthy era and is at odds with American constitutional values and the basic mission of universities.”

The letter sent to universities is available here: <https://www.aclu.org/documents/open-letter-college-university-presidents-protect-speech-on-campus>

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