



# Firewall for Freedom: Campus Resolution Toolkit

Across the country, students are speaking out on urgent human rights issues including war, refugee and migrant rights, trans rights, racial justice, and reproductive rights.

At the same time, the Trump administration is threatening college and university funding if schools do not capitulate to the administrations' demands about multiple facets of college and university life. The Trump administration has tried to dictate what colleges and universities can teach; undermined efforts to create inclusive environments for LGBTQ+ youth; attempted to ban programs to promote racial justice, equity, inclusion and belonging; and has sought to limit what speech colleges and universities allow from students.

Some colleges have curtailed freedom of expression and peaceful protest, suspended or expelled students, censored speech, and canceled events. Others have ended programs focused on promoting diversity, equity and inclusion; rescinded policies that support LGBTQ+ students; or limited student participation in extracurricular activities. **Our rights are under attack. Our school leaders need to hear from us.**

No one should be punished for peaceful protest; no one should be threatened for exercising free speech; and no one should be deported for speaking out for human rights. All students should feel like they belong on their campus and are free to be themselves without being harassed or singled out. **Our schools must fight to protect our rights – and refuse to collaborate in the government's attacks on our campus.**

Your voice matters, and you matter.

Amnesty International USA (AIUSA) and the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) have teamed up to help students defend their campuses from the Trump administration. Together, we are working to create a "firewall" for students against these attacks on our rights. We are working with students across the country to introduce and pass campus resolutions that call on their campus administrations to *defend* the rights of students and refuse to voluntarily collaborate with the Trump administration's attacks on free speech, academic freedom, and inclusive learning environments.

This toolkit, combined with support from AIUSA and ACLU, provides you with tools and resources to advance a resolution on your campus.

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## Firewall for Freedom Resolutions

What is a Firewall for Freedom Resolution?

A resolution is a motion adopted by an official body such as a student council, and is a formal expression of an opinion. A Firewall for Freedom resolution is a declaration of support for students, faculty, and staff who are under attack by the Trump administration for exercising their rights to freedom of expression, association, and assembly, passed through your student council or student government.

Right now, the White House and federal agencies are engaged in a brazen attempt to intimidate schools into compromising on free speech and academic freedom and into abandoning their lawful efforts to create inclusive learning environments. But in higher education, academic freedom protects schools from government interference in choices over what professors teach, including with regard to racial justice, equity, inclusion and belonging. Schools should continue to support students by maintaining a safe and equitable learning environment for all students.

The resolution calls on the school to establish a firewall for freedom. Establishing a firewall means that schools will not voluntarily share their resources – including their staff's time or the data they collect on students and faculty – with federal law enforcement who are seeking to violate our human rights or target members of our school community based on their exercise of human rights.

There is a draft resolution in the Appendix section.

## Why You Should Pass a Resolution on Campus

- To show support for students, faculty, and staff who are being targeted or punished for the lawful exercise of their right to freedom of expression, including the right to protest.
- To protect all of our rights to peaceful expression of our beliefs.
- To show that your student body supports the rights of all people regardless of immigration status, country of origin, refugee status, race, ethnicity, sex, gender identity, sexual orientation, disability, or religious affiliation to live with dignity, safety, and full enjoyment of their human rights without discrimination, including the rights to life, freedom, education, and security.
- To provide accurate information about civil liberties and human rights including the rights to freedom of expression, association, and assembly.
- To pressure your campus officials to take concrete action to protect the rights of all students, including the rights to free speech and assembly, and to not proactively work with government agencies to infringe on these rights or to target students, no matter their immigration status.

## Steps to Passing a Resolution

### 1. Find out how your student government works:

- Who sits on the student government body? Are there both student and staff roles?
- What is the process for submitting a resolution? Can you submit a resolution as a student? If not, what is the alternative?
- Is there a certain time of the school year when resolutions can be submitted? What is the timeline for your student government ending business this year?
- How long might the resolution process take? And can you speed that up?

### 2. Identify allies and others who can help you pass this resolution

- Think about any individual students or other student organizations who might care about this issue and want to help. Consider bringing in faculty who teach ethnic studies, law, international relations, or public policy, local civil rights organizations or legal clinics, and alumni networks.
- Reach out individually to those likely to support your goal and ask if they would be willing to join you. Ask them to join the sign on letter or sign the petition (see below) and if they'll help get other signatures.
- When asking for their support, consider what resources or relationships they or their group have that could help you publicize the resolution or gain more supporters.
- You might also consider how enthusiastic they seem. If they agree to support you but don't seem too excited, you might want to start by asking them to do something small, like post on social media or sign onto a joint letter announcing the resolution.
- In addition to allies, identify likely opposition to this resolution. Consider what your school leadership has said or done related to speech and protest (and other student rights) in the past year, as well as other groups that might oppose your efforts.

### 3. Find a student government member who is likely to support the resolution

- Approach them and be ready to make your case. Why is this resolution important to you? Why should they support it? Ask if they will support your resolution within student government.
- Before your meeting, brainstorm answers to possible questions that they might ask before deciding whether or not to support.
- Depending on how your school government works, you may ask them to introduce the resolution at an upcoming student government meeting.
- Ask whether they know of other student leaders who would also be likely to support it, and approach them too, to build as much support as possible.

#### 4. Rally your campus! Amplify your message and build support

- Collect signatures from students to support the resolution (draft petition [below](#)). Set a goal, and aim for a number that shows broad student backing—like 25% of the student body.
- Consider a letter signed by various student organizations supporting the resolution (sample sign on letter [below](#)). A broad coalition will show the power of the student body.
- Use your networks: Ask your faculty advisor or other professors and staff for ways to speak in classrooms, make presentations, or lead discussions.
- Make your case in campus media: Pitch a column or letter to the editor explaining why your resolution matters and should be adopted (sample letter to the editor below). Here are some [tips for writing](#) a letter to the editor.
- Organize a teach-in, storytelling circle, or vigil to engage people emotionally and intellectually. You can also host a demonstration or protest about this issue to show support.
- Build a strong social media presence, and ask partner groups and individuals to amplify your message.

#### 5. Attend any public student government meetings about the resolution

- Mobilize large groups to attend in order to demonstrate broad support for the resolution.
- Have spokespersons from your group ready to speak on behalf of the resolution.
- Take pictures! Tweet and tag @amnestyusa @ACLU using #FirewallForFreedom and #HumanRightsCampus, and be sure to send pictures and updates to [firewall@aiusa.org](mailto:firewall@aiusa.org).

#### 6. Celebrate

- Share your pictures! Use the Hashtag #FireWallForFreedom and #HumanRightsCampus and tag @amnestyusa @ACLU on all social media platforms. This helps other students see your victory!
- Send ‘thank you’ notes to everyone who supported the resolution
- Write a letter to the editor of your local paper/university newspaper

## How to Get Support

Staff at ACLU and AIUSA are available to support in planning and carrying out your resolution campaign, and can ensure you’re familiar with your legal, constitutional rights along the way.

- Let us know what’s happening on your campus, especially if you’re seeing your campus leadership acting in cooperation with unlawful actions by the Trump administration. This helps us keep an eye on trends and actions nationwide, and we can follow up with you if you need specific support. [Fill out the form here.](#)
- When you kick off your resolution work, let us know by emailing [firewall@aiusa.org](mailto:firewall@aiusa.org) and we’ll add you to a WhatsApp group with other students working on resolutions. You can share ideas, ask for feedback, and collaborate.
- Review the Know Your Rights resources in the Appendix, including those for immigrants.

# Appendix

## Draft Resolution

*A resolution calling for a firewall for freedom to protect against the federal government's attacks on our constitutional, civil, and human rights.*

The [University Student Senate] Enacts:

WHEREAS, [University/College Name] prides itself on being a campus that supports the civil and human rights of all members of our community, including students, staff and faculty;

WHEREAS, the ability to criticize our government, its policies, and even its foundational philosophies is critical to the exercise of all our civil and human rights--and is protected against government interference by the First Amendment;

WHEREAS, the White House is pressuring university officials to assist it in targeting students, faculty, and staff who are not U.S. citizens, including holders of non-immigrant visas and lawful permanent residents, as punishment for the lawful exercise of their rights to freedom of expression under the Constitution and international law;

WHEREAS, across the country, students are increasingly afraid of being accosted and taken from their communities by federal law enforcement agents, including those who conceal their identity and refuse to provide basic information, and who abuse immigration laws to target students for what they believe and who they are;

WHEREAS, protected political speech and association alone—no matter how offensive to members of the campus community—should never be the basis for discipline, nor should it lead to an individual's arrest, detention or deportation;

WHEREAS, the White House and federal agencies are threatening to deprive universities across the country of federal grant money and other sources of support, in order to gain their cooperation and capitulation in efforts to punish dissent, attack non-citizens, students of color, and LGBTQ+ youth, and dictate educational programs;

WHEREAS, this includes brazen attempts to intimidate schools into abandoning lawful efforts to create inclusive learning environments;

WHEREAS, schools are obligated under federal law to protect students from discrimination, harassment, threats, and violence;

WHEREAS, schools are also obligated under federal law to ensure the integrity and confidentiality of student records, including against unwarranted disclosure to the government or private parties;

BE IT RESOLVED, the student body of [university/college] declares its support for the protection of civil and human rights of all members of our campus community and calls upon the [university/college] president to take all possible measures to ensure that our campus is a safe space, where students may exercise their rights without fear or intimidation;

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, the student body encourages the [University/college] President and Board of Trustees to resist White House and federal agency demands that undermine academic freedom and our civil and human rights in exchange for an illusory promise of continued federal grantmaking;

BE IT RESOLVED, the student body of [university/college] calls on the [university/college] President to employ their authority to establish a firewall for freedom, prohibiting employees of the [university/college] from voluntarily providing information or assistance in response to a request from federal authorities or out-of-state authorities that seeks—

- a. to identify, or impose civil or criminal liability or other penalties, including termination or reduction of grant funding, upon a person or entity based on their participation in activities protected by the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution including assembly, petitioning, expression of viewpoints, and speech;
- b. to identify or apprehend a person in order to subject them to immigration detention, removal or deportation proceedings; or to prosecute a person or persons for offenses related to immigration status based on their participation in activities protected by the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution including assembly, petitioning expression of viewpoints and speech; and
- c. to investigate the sex or gender of a student, faculty, or staff member.

### Talking Points on Resolution

- Right now, the Trump administration is pressuring colleges and universities to crack down on students, faculty, and staff for speaking their minds about issues impacting people of color, religious minorities, LGBTQ+ and immigrant communities. But that's not how free speech works.
- We all have a right to read, teach, discuss, and learn. Period. Censoring academic work by and about people of color, religious minorities, and LGBTQ+ people because the government doesn't like the messages and viewpoints expressed is discriminatory and clearly violates our free speech rights.
- Students, faculty, and staff do not give up their rights by entering colleges or universities. Students also have rights under US federal law to keep certain information private and not to have that information revealed without their consent.
- While new executive orders and statements from the White House are pushing schools to monitor and report noncitizen students for their political views, universities and colleges have a responsibility to defend their students, faculty, and staff who are under attack.
- Antisemitism, Islamophobia or targeting individuals and communities for their religion, ethnicity or nationality are all hatred and must be condemned.
- Universities should be places where individuals can lean into their passions, share ideas, and discover themselves, not where students and faculty fear surveillance or punishment for being themselves. By passing a Firewall For Freedom resolution, university leaders can remain firm in their commitment to free speech, open debate, and peaceful dissent on campus.
- Under the slew of attacks on LGBTQ +rights, universities and colleges should continue to support students by maintaining a safe and equitable learning environment for LGBTQ+ youth and other students.
- More than ever, it is imperative to create frameworks that can truly protect the civil rights of communities on campus, their personal data, and their overall safety.

### Your Right to Protest

Protest is a powerful way to speak truth to power. Throughout history, student-led protests have driven major change, exposing injustice, demanding accountability, and inspiring hope for a better future. You have the **right to peacefully protest**, and the government has a **duty to respect, protect, and facilitate** that right—not suppress it. Unless a protest violates content-neutral and reasonable time, place, and manner restrictions, obstructs traffic or access to buildings, or poses a threat to the safety or rights of others, interference by the government is not justified. If you attend a private school, keep in mind that, as a legal matter, the school is not a government actor and is not constrained by the First Amendment, so it may impose additional restrictions.

- Learn more about your rights to protest under US law: [Know Your Protest Rights](#) (ACLU)
- [Take Amnesty's Human Rights Course to learn why the right to protest is protected by human rights law and standards.](#)
- If you're an Amnesty International Student group, learn more about protesting as Amnesty: [Protest Q&A](#)
- [ACLU Open Letter to College and University Presidents on Student Protests](#)

### Your Right to Speech and Association

You have the right to freely express your beliefs-- and not only can the government not infringe on that right, it has to ensure you are able to exercise that right. **The right to freedom of expression** is enshrined in Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and protected by a raft of international and regional treaties and the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution. Indeed, the right to protest is part of this umbrella of rights.

Freedom of expression also underpins other human rights such as the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion – and allows them to flourish.

- [Take Amnesty's Human Rights Course to Learn more about Freedom of Expression.](#)
- [ACLU Open Letter to Colleges and University Leaders: Reject Efforts to Restrict Constitutionally Protected Speech on Campus](#)
- [ACLU Open Letter to Colleges and Universities: Protect Campus Speech](#)

### Your right to protest as an immigrant under U.S. law (source: [National Immigration Law Center](#))

The First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution prohibits the government from restricting your right to free speech. This means that you have a right to participate in political protests, marches, and demonstrations. The First Amendment also protects freedom of the press (among other rights). **These rights apply to everyone in the U.S., regardless of immigration status.** At the same time, your risks may vary depending on your individual circumstances, including immigration status, and you should take those into account. Individuals should consider their own level of safety, comfort and visibility in these situations. For example:

- Consider leaving immediately if it appears that the situation is escalating.
- If you choose to take your mobile phone with you, use a passcode instead of facial recognition or Touch ID, and be aware that your phone can be seized by authorities.
- Know your rights and know your risks. If you are concerned about being identified or retaliated against for holding certain views, consider using a pseudonym when signing petitions, and review your digital hygiene practices and privacy settings

More resources around safety and your rights:

- [AIUSA Know Your Rights: How to Stay Safe Around ICE](#)
- [National Immigration Law Center's Know Your Rights: Immigrants' Participation in Protests](#)
- [ACLU Know Your Rights](#)

### **ACLU Resources on Students' Rights**

- [ACLU Know Your Rights: Students' Rights](#)
- [ACLU Know Your Rights: Students' Free Speech on Campus - Graphics](#)

### **Your Right to Learn and Express Viewpoints**

Freedom of expression protects our right to read, learn and share ideas free from viewpoint-based censorship, including in curricular and extracurricular settings. No government actor should be able to suppress that right by banning books, restricting classroom learning, and prohibiting discussions, debates, and student activities and clubs solely because of viewpoints, including those related to diversity, equity and inclusion. Moreover, on college and university campuses, the First Amendment's protection for academic freedom protects professors' speech, research, and publications.

More resources around your right to learn:

- [ACLU Right to Learn Campaign](#)

### **Your Rights as an LGBTQ+ Individual on Campus**

Unfortunately, the Trump administration has been working to roll back federal rules ensuring protections for transgender students under Title IX, and is targeting colleges and universities who have supportive transgender policies by launching investigations and threatening funding. However, the Trump administration cannot change the law itself which still provides protections, and many state officials, school administrators, and colleges and universities are fighting back to make sure LGBTQ+ students are protected. Some states have more explicit state-level protections for LGBTQ+ students. And all students have the right to an education and to safety and privacy at school.

### **Ideas for Educating Your Community about this Resolution**

- Pop-Up Human Rights Gallery: Consistent with school rules, transform a hallway, library wall, or outdoor space into a visual storytelling installation featuring prominent activists' stories, student art, and quotes about freedom of expression and the right to protest
- Open Mic Night: Invite students to perform original poems, stories or music related to identity, dignity, protest or belonging
- Op-ed: Work with the campus newspaper to write a positive article about the right to protest
- Photo Petition: ask students to take photos holding signs like: 'Protect Protest. Defend Dignity'; 'Freedom of Expression is a Human Right'. Create a digital collage or display it in a central campus area to spark conversation.
- Zine-making workshop: Co-host with an art department to provide space for students to create visuals advocating for the rights to free expression, protest, and association. Distribute zines or posters around campus or include in a public installation.
- Syllabus Collaboration: partner with a professor to include a film screening, a reading, or Amnesty/ACLU action in a class session. Bonus: Host a panel with the professor after class.



## Sample Petition

All people have the right to say what they think, share information, and demand a better world. **No one should be punished for peaceful protest; no one should be threatened for exercising free speech; and no one should be deported for speaking out for human rights. All students should feel like they belong on their campus, are free to be themselves without being harassed or singled out, and can participate in the extracurriculars of their choice.** The leadership of [INSERT SCHOOL NAME] must fight to protect our rights – **and refuse to collaborate in attacks on our human rights.**

We, the undersigned, call on our leaders to establish a firewall for freedom. We support the resolution calling on school leadership to not voluntarily share their resources – including their personnel and our data – with federal law enforcement seeking to violate our human rights or target members of our school community based on their exercise of human rights.

[illegible]

## Sample Sign On Letter

All people have the right to say what they think, share information, and demand a better world. **No one should be punished for peaceful protest; no one should be threatened for exercising free speech; and no one should be deported for speaking out for human rights. All students should feel like they belong on their campus, are free to be themselves without being harassed or singled out, and can participate in the extracurriculars of their choice.** The leadership of [INSERT SCHOOL NAME] must fight to protect our rights – **and refuse to collaborate in attacks on our human rights.**

We, the undersigned student organizations, call on our leaders to establish a firewall for freedom. We support the resolution calling on school leadership to not voluntarily share their resources – including their personnel and our data – with federal law enforcement seeking to violate our human rights or target members of our school community based on their exercise of human rights.

[INSERT ANY RELEVANT CONTEXT SPECIFIC TO YOUR CAMPUS]

Signed,

## Sample Letter to the Editor of your campus paper

*Note: personalize your letter as much as possible. Here are some [tips for writing](#) a letter to the editor.*

The Trump administration is attacking universities across the country, trying to dictate what they can teach; attempting to ban programs that promote equity; and trying to limit protest and free speech. Federal agencies are demanding access to student data, scrutinizing syllabi, and threatening to withhold money to campuses that don't cooperate <specify to example from your campus if applicable>

What's worse, we've seen university leaders who have chosen compliance over courage: shutting down programs, limiting free speech and protest, not protecting students. This must not happen at <University Name>.

That's why our student government must pass the Firewall for Freedom Resolution, which urges <campus President NAME> and university leadership to protect our rights – and refuse to collaborate in attacks on our human rights.

We can either be a university that caves under political pressure and betrays its principles, or one that stands firm in protecting its students and defending academic freedom, free speech, and all our rights.

## Sample Video Script for Social Media

The Trump administration is attacking our rights as students to speech, protest, and an inclusive education — and [university name] is not immune. One of the most important ways we can fight back is by passing a campus resolution demanding our school administrators refuse to coordinate with the federal government's crackdown on our rights.

As the [role] of [name of student organization], and as a student concerned with universities across the country capitulating to Trump's demands, I hope you join me in keeping [university name] a place where academic freedom thrives by signing our petition urging student government to pass this resolution.

Together, we have the power to pass a resolution and send a strong message to our school officials: We demand they protect their students.

## ACLU Letter to College and University General Counsels

The ACLU shared an open letter to general counsels at colleges and universities across the nation outlining their responsibilities and rights when dealing with Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) investigations and enforcement actions.

Amid the growing retaliatory crackdown against noncitizen students for their First Amendment-protected speech and advocacy, the open letter explains that colleges and universities are not violating the law by providing housing or services to noncitizen students, including students whose visas have been revoked by the government. It further advises institutions that they are legally able to refuse to comply with warrantless searches of non-public areas, like dorm rooms, by ICE agents.

The letter also outlines a legal framework for responding to administrative subpoenas from ICE. In consultation with legal counsel, universities generally maintain the right to not respond to administrative subpoenas unless and until ICE obtains an enforcement order from a judge. Universities also have the right to publicize the subpoenas or alert students if their information has been targeted by an ICE subpoena.

[You can read and download the full letter here to share with your campus administration.](#)