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Consortium of Universities for Global Health Press Release

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USING THE PUBLIC PURSE TO BULLY ACADEMIA WEAKENS THE US.

The Consortium of Universities for Global Health (CUGH) stands in firm opposition to the increasing efforts by the U.S. government to use taxpayer funds as a means to stifle academic freedom and interfere with the autonomy of academic institutions. Such actions represent a dangerous threat to the foundational pillars of democracy, which rely on the free exchange of ideas, evidence-based debate, and the protection of intellectual inquiry.

Academic freedom is essential to the advancement of public health, both in the United States and globally. It allows researchers, educators, and students to openly investigate complex challenges from emerging infectious diseases to the social determinants of health and share evidence-based findings without fear of political reprisal. When the federal government uses funding as a weapon to silence dissenting perspectives or dismantle programs addressing health equity and human rights, it not only undermines scientific integrity but also threatens the democratic values of free inquiry and open discourse. A nation's capacity to protect public health, respond to global crises, and foster innovation depends on the independence of its academic institutions. Curtailing that freedom weakens both our democracy and our ability to lead in global health.

In early 2025, the administration enacted Executive Order 14151, mandating the elimination of diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility (DEIA) programs across all federal agencies. The federal government also threatened to withhold nearly \$50 million in funding from the University of Maine System, citing alleged Title IX violations due to the state's policies allowing transgender athletes to participate in sports consistent with their gender identity. This action jeopardized critical research initiatives, including studies on per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) contamination and biofuel development, which are vital to Maine's public health and environmental sustainability efforts. Governor Janet Mills challenged the legality of these threats, emphasizing that such federal overreach undermines both state sovereignty and the foundational principle of academic freedom.

Most recently, 60 universities including Columbia, Johns Hopkins, Brown, Northwestern, Pennsylvania, UCLA, California, USC, Berkeley, Virginia, George Washington and Princeton have been identified for special attention or have received letters from the administration threatening the withholding of financial support unless they cracked down on DEI related initiatives and allegations of antisemitism. Harvard University faced the suspension of approximately \$2.3 billion in federal funding after resisting demands to dismantle DEI programs and suppress certain campus groups. The administration further threatened to revoke Harvard's tax-exempt status and its ability to enroll international students. These are just two examples that underscore the dangers posed when the

federal government is using its financial leverage to impose ideological agendas on academic institutions, threatening the integrity of scientific research and democratic governance. CUGH urges the U.S. government and state legislatures to immediately cease the use of public funds as a tool for suppressing academic expression. It calls upon academic institutions, professional associations, its members, allied groups and the public to:

- **Defend the autonomy of academic institutions to set curricula, host open forums, and support scholarship free from political interference.**
- **Engage Elected Officials**
Contact your federal and state representatives in their state offices to defend academic freedom. You can reach your federal members at <https://www.congress.gov/members/find-your-member>
- **Advocate against legislation and policies that condition public funding on the suppression of specific academic programs, topics, or viewpoints.**
- **Stand in solidarity with scholars and students whose rights to academic freedom and free expression are threatened.**
- **Share Your Story**
Have you or someone you know been affected by these changes? Share your experience with CUGH. Send a short, under 3 min. testimonial to info@cugh.org. **By sending us a video you are giving CUGH permission to share it publicly via its platforms.**

Preserving academic freedom is not merely a university issue; it is a matter of public interest, freedom and democratic integrity. The US administration must stop interfering in these areas or democracy and the rights of all Americans will be diminished.

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