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October 3, 2025

Christine Paxson, President
Brown University
1 Prospect Street
Box 1860
Providence, RI 02912

VIA MAIL AND EMAIL
president@brown.edu

Dear President Paxson:

Yesterday, Brown University, along with eight other universities, was confronted with yet another troubling attempt by the Trump administration to completely undermine the role of higher education in this country. This time, the threat comes in the form of a proposed “compact” to deny or restrict federal funding to the university if it does not sign on to an agreement that would impose numerous unconscionable conditions on the university’s activities and mission.

Among other things, agreeing to this compact would restrict university employees from speaking out on political issues, limit the enrollment of foreign students, and once again require the university to essentially deny the existence of transgender students. The compact makes no serious attempt to hide its real intent. While it purports to demand that universities promote a “marketplace of ideas” on campus, it also obligates universities to prohibit anything that would “belittle” “conservative ideas.”

I trust I do not need to go into any more detail about the specifics of what entering into the compact with this Presidential administration would mean. Presumably the requirements are as offensive to you as they are to the many educational organizations — such as the American Association of University Professors¹ and the American Council on Education² — that have already quickly and roundly condemned the proposal.

Unfortunately, this is not the first time we have raised the alarm about your university’s collaboration with this Presidential administration. Just two months ago, the ACLU of Rhode Island, along with other organizations, shared our deep concerns with your university’s agreement with the Trump administration that included the adoption of their narrow, discriminatory definition of sex. We remain hopeful that such a mistake will not be repeated. Just as importantly, we think it is crucial that you immediately, publicly, and unequivocally denounce this blatant attempt to destroy academic freedom at universities.

We believe that your university’s previous capitulation has simply empowered and emboldened the Trump administration to demand more. It is only by sending a clear, strong, and

¹ <https://www.aaup.org/news/universities-must-reject-trump-admin-loyalty-oath-compacts>

² <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/10/02/us/politics/trump-college-funding.html>

visible message that these attacks on the mission of higher education will not be tolerated that one can ever hope to stop them. Therefore, we urge you to not only resist these and any further unconstitutional demands from this administration, but to forcefully and publicly reject them and urge your colleagues to do the same.

Thank you in advance for your attention to this critical matter. I do not think it is an exaggeration to say that the response by universities to this latest brazen attempt by the executive branch to interfere with academic freedom may determine the fate of higher education's autonomy for decades to come.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Steven Brown", with a stylized, flowing script.

Steven Brown
Executive Director