



## NEWS RELEASE

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### **State Education Labor Leaders call on SUNY, CUNY chancellors to challenge Trump administration attacks on the public higher education systems**

*In this press statement, United University Professions President Frederick E. Kowal, Professional Staff Congress/CUNY President James Davis and Roberta Elins, a NYSUT Board of Directors member representing SUNY community colleges, call on SUNY Chancellor John King Jr. and CUNY Chancellor Félix Matos Rodríguez to immediately declare that SUNY and CUNY will challenge any attempts by the Trump administration to undermine academic freedom, threaten the integrity of scientific research, stifle free speech and trample the due process rights of all students—including international students.*

"The only way to deal with a bully is to stand up to him, whatever the outcome, because the bully interprets all else as weakness. To preserve the great SUNY and CUNY institutions we know, and to transform them for the future, we must fight for them.

"It is time for SUNY Chancellor John King Jr., and CUNY Chancellor Félix Matos Rodríguez to state preemptively and unequivocally that SUNY and CUNY will contest and resist any and all attempts by any administration of the government to undermine academic freedom and shared governance on any of its campuses, and that they will fight the Trump administration's effort to revoke international student and work visas and remove them from campus—and ultimately the country.

"The Trump administration is only interested in crushing academic freedom and university research and flipping higher education to control how students think and what they think. Harvard University's president and faculty just took a courageous stand against the administration's vicious attacks. We see Harvard's defiance as a turning point for higher education. President Trump and his enablers are hell-bent on destroying the freedom of thought and expression that have for centuries been hallmarks of university campuses, laboratories and classrooms.

“Prestige universities have been the initial targets, but make no mistake, the attacks will not stop there. The Trump administration will come after colleges and universities large and small, silencing dissenting voices as it exerts improper control over academic inquiry at higher education institutions across the country.

“We strongly support and appreciate an April 22 letter signed by more than 200 college and university presidents—including Chancellor Matos Rodríguez and several CUNY and SUNY campus presidents—that speaks out against the Trump administration’s overreach regarding higher education. But this letter, while well-intentioned, does not go nearly far enough to defend and protect our students, our academics and professionals, nor does it confront and reject the administration’s attacks on academic freedom, diversity, equity and inclusion and research funding, among so many other egregious actions it has taken during its short but tumultuous time in office.

“It is regrettable that up until this point, Chancellor King has chosen not to sign on to the letter. Chancellor, SUNY is a target of the Trump administration and the attacks will come. Attempting to hide from this reality is misguided, at the very least.

“As chancellors of the nation’s largest and most comprehensive public higher education systems, it is time for them to show courage and to lead, right now. Other college and university administrators will follow their lead. But chancellors King and Matos Rodríguez must not wait for that to happen.

“They should work to form an academic mutual defense compact, like the initiative created by [Big 10 University leaders](#). A coalition of colleges and universities standing together can plan a strong, unified answer to Trump’s assault on higher ed, including legal, communications, advocacy and other responses. An attack on one is an attack on all.

“Only by coordinating to fight side by side can higher education defeat Trump’s legal, political and financial extortion campaign against the nation’s colleges and universities. There is no time to waste.”

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[\*The Professional Staff Congress\*](#) (NYSUT, AFT Local 2334), represents 30,000 faculty and professional staff at the City University of New York.

[\*United University Professions\*](#) (UUP, AFT/NYSUT Local 2190) is the nation's largest higher education union, with more than 42,000 academic and professional faculty and retirees.

[\*New York State United Teachers\*](#) (NYSUT) is a federation of more than 1,200 local unions, each representing its own members. NYSUT represents more than 600,000 members who work in, or are retired from, New York's schools, colleges, and health care facilities.