

Friday, June 5th, 2020, 8:46am

Dear President Lawrence Bacow,

We are at a crossroads in this country. The murder of George Floyd is just one of the innumerable cases of systemic anti-Black racism and [police brutality](#) that this country was built upon. **As helpless as we may feel, we recognize that this is not a time to be silent but to take action.** We want the world to be better for our children but we also want it to be better for us. We believe that you feel the same way.

We, therefore, ask you to join us in not only lamenting the loss of George Floyd but also condemning the four police officers responsible for his murder, and the attacks on protesters fighting against these injustices. We ask you to condemn the pervasive and willful choice that many make to participate in anti-Black racism in the U.S. We ask you to explicitly name systematic oppression and white supremacy as root causes of anti-Black violence.

Our actions at the national level are vital but what we do locally matters just as much. Looking more closely at Harvard, while progress has been made, we need to do better and we need to move more quickly. We ask for your partnership in our mission to **fight against racial injustice and dismantle the structures and mechanisms that harm the Black community and other communities of color.** Despite the current economic climate, we feel that this is a time to be bold and devote University resources to this vital mission. As the University digs deeper to invest in this shared mission, we pledge to offer counsel on how the University should prioritize this spending.

We are calling on Harvard to partner with us to take actions that reflect our values as a community:

Support Protesters and Activists

- 1. Match student, postdoc, staff, and faculty [donations](#) by giving an equivalent or larger dollar amount to the [Massachusetts Bail Fund](#), [Violence in Boston](#), [Black Lives Matter Boston](#), and the [National Black Justice Coalition](#) in order to support protesters and activists at the local and national level. The collective resources of individual members of our community merit at least a proportional response from our institution.**
- 2. Provide *pro bono* legal defense for protesters and activists who are detained.** We are calling on Harvard to mobilize its networks within and outside of our University to offer their time and talents and we are especially leaning on our colleagues at Harvard Law School.

Ensure Community Well-Being and Safety

- 3. Divest from inherently racist institutions that perpetuate violence and oppression against Black communities and invest in systems that will protect and uplift us.** This entails divesting from [current policing structures](#) used on campus and investing in the creation of an anti-racist campus security team by 2021. This organization should: (1) implement a rigorous hiring and continuous training process that prevents anti-Black racism and violence, (2) enact a zero-tolerance policy for employees who engage in these practices, (3) collect and release an annual report on discriminatory conduct, (4) be held accountable by a Harvard community board, and (5) be regularly evaluated by an external committee.
- 4. Disclose Harvard's relationship with local police departments and protect our Black community members from being brutalized by them.** This includes providing information on contracting and partnerships, as well as enacting a transparent, detailed police brutality

prevention plan for all stakeholders in this relationship. [Police brutality](#) toward members of the Harvard community, such as the [events of April 2018](#), should never happen.

**5. Diversify the staff of its mental health services to reflect the student body's diversity.**

This includes the hiring of more Black clinicians and other clinicians of color and ensuring that all Counseling and Mental Health Services providers are trained in dealing with racial trauma. These requests are especially urgent for addressing current trauma and are supported by data from the Harvard Mental Health Task Force showing that underrepresented minority (URM) students are disproportionately affected by depression and anxiety.

**6. Establish a reporting system for racial discrimination and harassment prior to the return of students to campus.**

In order to thrive, students need a learning environment in which not only COVID-19 but also racism is eradicated. This will require a system with easily navigable and transparent procedures to report all incidents of subtle and overt racism, codified consequences for all offenders, and an extensive infrastructure like the Title IX Office.

*Promote Justice-Oriented Research and Diverse Scholars*

**7. Uphold and invest in research to end the legacy of racism and inequality in the U.S.**

In addition to upholding its previous commitment to the [Harvard Legacy of Slavery initiative](#), we want Harvard to recognize, financially support, and amplify the efforts of [those who are already doing this work](#) and establish fellowships to attract the next generation of graduate student and postdoc scholars to work on this critical research across a myriad of disciplines.

**8. Hold faculty search committees and departments accountable to increase the hiring and retention of more Black faculty as well as those from underrepresented groups in tenure-track positions.**

URMs make up as little as [4-5%](#) of faculty in multiple schools and divisions. In addition, search committees, which should themselves be diverse, should recruit ethno-racially diverse candidate pools. The University should establish faculty mentoring to ensure progress to tenure and address the additional burden that faculty of color carry.

*Advance a Culture of Sustainable Inclusive Excellence*

**9. Require every Harvard school and department to provide diversity, inclusion, and belonging training for members of our community at all levels, from students to faculty and administrators.**

Rather than one-time events or reactions to crises, these must be regularly occurring and sustained conversations and opportunities for learning, self-reflection, and growth. This will require a robust, long-term financial and institutional commitment and a redefinition of what it means to be a member of the Harvard community.

**10. Require that each Harvard school have and maintain an Office of Diversity and Inclusion (ODI).**

Over the years, Harvard Law School students have appealed to the administration to establish an ODI but those [requests have not been fulfilled](#). Furthermore, the vacancies in the School of Public Health's ODI reflect a failure to maintain this office.

**11. Protect and expand financial support for personnel in and programming by offices at Harvard that advance diversity, inclusion, and belonging.**

These offices, where they exist, are notoriously understaffed and overworked, leading to a reliance on unpaid student labor to lead and sustain these efforts. If [sustainable inclusive excellence](#) is a core value at Harvard, then the University should invest in this space and not divest from it.

We will not go unheard. We hope that our requests will become the foundation of a dialogue that is necessary for change at Harvard and in our surrounding communities. We envision a world where we can live without fear—one where we too can thrive. We are eager to begin this conversation with you.

In solidarity,  
**The Harvard Coalition for Black Lives**

- GSAS Minority Biomedical Scientists of Harvard
- W.E.B. Du Bois Graduate Society of GSAS
- One Queer Harvard
- LGBTQ@GSAS Association
- GSAS Diversity and Inclusion Fellows
- Biomedical Graduate Student Organization (HMS)
- African American Student Union at HBS
- LGBTQ and Allies at Harvard Medical School
- HGSE Black Student Union
- Harambee: Students of African Descent at HDS
- GSAS Latinx Student Association
- GSAS Underrepresented Scholars in Neuroscience
- Harvard Graduate Women In Science and Engineering at GSAS
- Harvard Black Graduate Ministries
- Social Issues in Biology Club (HMS)
- Harvard Chan Public Health, Innovation, and Technology
- Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Fellowship (HSPH)
- Harvard GSAS Science Policy Group
- Harvard Puerto Rican Student Association
- GSAS Harvard Biotech Club
- The Leder Human Biology and Translational Medicine Program (HMS)
- Harvard Black Graduate Student Alliance
- HGSE Comunidad Latinx
- HGSE QueerEd
- GSAS Graduate Society of Underrepresented Students in STEM
- Harvard Health Professions Recruitment and Exposure Program
- Harvard Black Law Students Association

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Our open letter was emailed to Harvard President Larry Bacow on Friday, June 5th, 2020 at 8:46am. These are **our partners** who stand in solidarity with our message:

- Student National Medical Association - Harvard Chapter
- The Division of Medical Sciences at Harvard Medical School
- Therapeutics Graduate Program, Harvard University
- Program in Virology, Harvard Medical School
- Harvard Graduate Student Union
- HMS Black Postdoctoral Association
- Harvard Black Community Leaders
- Harvard College Black Students Association
- Harvard Kennedy School Black Student Union

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Harvard College Generational African-American Students Association  
Harvard College Caribbean Club  
Harvard College African Students Association  
Harvard College Nigerian Students Association  
Harvard College Eritrean and Ethiopian Students Association  
Association of Black Harvard Women  
Harvard Black Men's Forum  
Harvard Society of Black Scientists and Engineers  
Harvard Black Premedical Society  
Harvard College Black Community and Student Theatre  
Harvard College Black Pre-Law Association  
Kuumba Singers of Harvard College  
Harvard Undergraduate Union of Mixed Students  
HSPH Latinx Students in Public Health Association  
HSPH Black Student Health Organization  
HGSE Dominican Student Association  
Harvard GSAS Women in Social Sciences and Humanities  
HGSE Pan-Asian Coalition for Education  
Latino Student Organization at Harvard Business School  
Science In The News (Harvard Medical School)  
HGSE Equity and Inclusion Fellows  
GSAS Student Council  
GSAS Student Center Fellows