

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

August 1, 2025

Dr. Alan M. Garber
President
Harvard University
Massachusetts Hall
Cambridge, MA 02138

Dear President Garber:

As Members of Congress and alumni of Harvard University, we write to express our deep concern regarding recent reports that the University is considering a substantial financial settlement—reportedly in the amount of \$500 million—with the Trump administration.¹ We caution that any such agreement may warrant rigorous Congressional oversight and inquiry.

We are alarmed that Harvard would contemplate a settlement of this magnitude under apparent political pressure. Such a decision would raise serious questions about the preservation of institutional autonomy and academic freedom. Capitulating to politically motivated demands from the Executive Branch risks setting a precedent that could severely undermine the independence not only of Harvard but of educational institutions nationwide. It would also signal to other universities that politically driven coercion—rather than legal merit—is a viable mechanism for extracting compliance.

This situation cannot be viewed in isolation. It is part of a broader pattern of attempted interference by the President and his administration in the governance of independent institutions, including universities, media organizations, and nonprofit entities. If these actions are rooted in students' concerns of legal compliance with civil rights law, any settlement must be with those students individually or as a class, not with a federal government bent on imposing its political will on universities. Yielding to such pressure would normalize the misuse of federal authority to suppress dissent and compromise academic integrity.

Harvard's response will have lasting implications. As a globally respected institution, your actions at this moment carry weight well beyond Cambridge. Any acquiescence to unjustified political threats would not only diminish Harvard's standing but also make it complicit in the erosion of fundamental democratic principles. Indeed, other institutions, which under similar coercion, have entered into agreements believing they were not sacrificing their independence have now succumbed to a kind of self-censorship, and been subject to ever greater demands by the administration. You cannot enter into a good faith agreement with a party not operating in good faith. We therefore urge the University, in the strongest possible terms, to consider these consequences should it consider any settlement that undermines its independence or validates the misuse of governmental power for partisan ends.

We also respectfully request clarity regarding the University's deliberations on this matter. Specifically, we ask that the University provide written responses to the following questions by August 13, 2025:

¹ Bender, Michael C, et al. "Harvard Is Said to Be Open to Spending up to \$500 Million to Resolve Trump Dispute." The New York Times, 28 July 2025, www.nytimes.com/2025/07/28/us/politics/trump-harvard-payment.html.

1. How many meetings, if any, have members of Harvard's leadership held with representatives of the Trump administration? Please clarify who is representing the Trump administration in any such discussions, what requests or demands they have made of the University, and what topics were discussed.
2. Has the University entered into, or seriously considered entering into, any agreements or settlements with the Trump administration? If so, what are the terms or conditions under consideration?
3. What role, if any, have faculty, students, and alumni played in advising or reviewing the University's position or negotiations?
4. How does the University intend to uphold its stated commitment to academic freedom and institutional integrity in the face of current threats or pressures?

Should Harvard pursue a settlement perceived to be a response to political intimidation rather than a good-faith resolution of a legitimate legal dispute, Congress retains both the authority and the obligation to investigate. This moment is a test of whether the University will uphold its foundational values or yield to external political influence. As one of the most prestigious, endowed universities in the world, and as a symbol of our nation's educational excellence, Harvard is uniquely positioned to resist improper political pressure from the administration. We hope that the University also possesses the requisite conviction.

We continue to hold Harvard in high regard for its enduring contributions to education, research, and public service. We look forward to your timely response and to ongoing dialogue about the role of higher education in protecting democratic norms, institutional independence, and freedom of speech.

Sincerely,



Chris Van Hollen
United States Senator



Sam T. Liccardo
Member of Congress



Adam B. Schiff
United States Senator



Ruben Gallego
United States Senator



Raul Ruiz, M.D.
Member of Congress



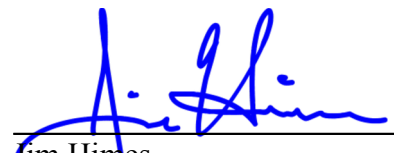
John Garamendi
Member of Congress



Robert C. "Bobby" Scott
Member of Congress



Mark Takano
Member of Congress



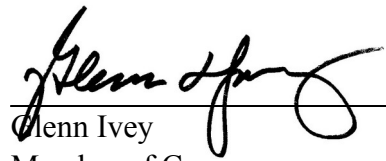
Jim Himes
Member of Congress



Joaquin Castro
Member of Congress



Pablo José Hernández
Member of Congress



Glenn Ivey
Member of Congress



Dave Min
Member of Congress



Luz M. Rivas
Member of Congress