



*A World with Dignity, Liberty, and Justice for All*

May 20, 2024

We at KARAMAH, are deeply concerned about the present atmosphere across our nation's university and college campuses. Young students, exercising their free speech rights, are being targeted, doxed, sanctioned, suspended, and arrested by militarized police forces called on them by their own universities and colleges.

We are also gravely concerned and dismayed at the recent actions of many university administrators and government actors in threatening freedom of assembly, speech, and academic freedom, in their handling of instances of student activism and peaceful campus protests. These actions have not only made our universities less safe for students and faculty, but they also violated First Amendment rights and the very principals of free exchange of ideas upon which academic institutions and our democracy rests.

The First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution protects the rights to free speech and expression from governmental interference. We value our Constitution and our First Amendment Rights of Freedom of Speech and Assembly. Indeed, KARAMAH has a long history of upholding free speech and expression by participating in discourses about these liberties in both domestic and international legal, educational, and policy arenas.

Messages that preach hate based on creed and ethnicity, such as the twin concepts of antisemitism and Islamophobia, are unacceptable. So are actions based on them. For this reason, while we recognize that many protesters were subjected to significant physical and verbal assaults, as documented by the media, we would like to focus here on those protesters who were victims of Islamophobia specifically. For example, University administrators have downplayed and disregarded the assaults and doxing of Arab and Muslim students. Not only have these protesting students been physically and verbally assaulted, but they have had hazardous chemicals sprayed on them. Worse yet, there have been hate-filled Islamophobic attempted murders of Arab/Muslim students for just wearing keffiyehs. These shocking facts have been completely disregarded by university administrators, legislators, and law enforcement. The students facing Islamophobic attacks are not offered extra security nor are they offered counseling and/or mental health services available to other students feeling unsafe on campuses.

The Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights should send a clear message to university administrators, under the auspices of the Administration's Initiative on Antisemitism and Islamophobia, that all students on campus must be protected, and that in our democracy freedoms of speech and assembly extend equally to all students on all campuses. Therefore, all students, regardless of their point of view, belief or ethnicity, should have the right to peacefully protest. Additionally, university administrators should understand that they are obligated to enforce laws fairly with neutrality, whether they agree or disagree with the contents of the speech.

American colleges and universities have long been global symbols of free speech, academic freedom, and critical inquiry. Unfortunately, with recent events, that status has diminished on the international stage. We urge colleges and universities to review their policies to ensure that they protect academic freedom for all their students and faculty. Students and faculty must be able to freely exercise these rights, in conformity with the traditions of free speech and exchange of ideas in our democracy. It would behoove university

officials to maintain a stance of neutrality when dealing with disagreement on substantive issues, and to vigorously defend academic freedom and critical inquiry in keeping with our traditions of democratic values.

Students who are protesting today are doing so in the proud tradition of those before them who protested the war in Vietnam, marched for civil rights, and boycotted against apartheid in South Africa. If history has taught us anything about these prior protests, it is that the young protestors of all creed, color, and backgrounds, idealistic and uncorrupted, have always sought to pursue a just world, even if it meant risking their own futures.

Therefore, in keeping with our traditions of democratic values, we firmly believe that no student should feel unsafe on his/her college/university campus, and administrators and legislators should ensure that every student's First Amendment rights are protected in our democracy.

XXXXXXXXXX