



DEFENDING FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION & PEACEFUL PROTEST: A STUDENT GUIDE

Students have the power to defend their campuses as spaces for free expression, peaceful protest, academic freedom, and inclusive learning. This toolkit is organized by different types of actions based on the capacity and resources your group has. Start where your group has capacity, then build momentum toward the main goal: introducing, passing, and implementing a **Firewall for Freedom campus resolution**.

The Firewall for Freedom resolution is the primary student organizing focus of this toolkit. But it is also part of AIUSA's broader **Defend Freedom of Expression and Peaceful Protest** Campaign, which calls on people across the country to defend the rights of students, protesters, journalists, and communities targeted for speaking out. Students and student groups can use the actions below to connect campus organizing to the broader Campaign.

CALLS TO ACTION

Priority Action: Pass a Firewall for Freedom Resolution:

Students can organize their campuses to introduce, promote and pass a Firewall for Freedom resolution through a student government. This is the strongest campus-based action because it moves students from awareness to institutional change. A resolution can help call on university leaders to protect free expression, peaceful protest, academic freedom, student privacy, and inclusive education and to refuse policies or practices that put students at risk for exercising their rights. **Learn more and sign up.**

Action: Tell School Leaders to Stop Complying with Attacks on Student Rights: Not every campus will be ready to pass a resolution right away. Students can still take immediate action by calling on school leaders to stop complying with Trump administration's anti-rights demands that restrict free expression, suppress programs that support marginalized communities, or limit what students can learn and discuss. **Sign AIUSA's petition and get others on your campus to sign too!**

Action: Call on Assistant Attorney General, Harmeet K. Dhillon to drop the charges against Georgia Fort and Protect Freedom of the Press: Freedom of expression, peaceful protest, and freedom of the press are deeply connected. Journalists play a critical role in documenting protests, exposing abuses, and helping the public understand what is happening when people speak out. AIUSA is calling on activists to defend press freedom and demand that charges be dropped against journalist Georgia Fort and other members of the press who are facing criminal charges after covering a protest.

- **Sign and share** the online petition urging Assistant Attorney General to drop the charges
- **Order your postcards** and use them during tabling, teach-in, letter writing event or campus action
- **Share the action** with student journalists, campus media, comms department and journalism program at your university!
- **Contact your two Senators** to defend press freedom: urge them to lead a Senate letter raising concerns about the federal charges against journalist Georgia Fort and other members of the press ([here](#) is the House of Representatives version- now we need it in the Senate!)
 - **Find your Senators** and their contact information [HERE](#)

- **Contact each Senator** by email, phone, or by requesting a virtual or in-person meeting.
- **Make a clear request:** Ask your Senators to lead a congressional letter urging the Department of Justice to address concerns about the prosecution of Georgia Fort and other journalists for reporting on a protest. You can pull from these talking points.
 - The right to free press is paramount in protecting human rights
 - I'm concerned at the multiple attacks on free press by President Trump and his administration
 - I'm particularly concerned about the federal charges brought against journalist Georgia Fort and others who were covering protests in Minnesota in January of this year.
 - Ms. Fort was covering the protest taking place in a church on January 16, 2026, and was clearly identified as a journalist
 - She was arrested on January 30 and faces federal indictment from the Department of Justice.
 - Multiple Congresspeople from The House of Representatives have joined a letter to the DOJ expressing concern about this case, but there is no Senate letter.
 - I am asking you to help lead a letter directed at the Department of Justice raising concern about this case and attacks on journalists.
 - PHONE: I would be happy to share the House letter with you.
 - EMAIL: share the letter if you are contacting them via email.
- **Follow up** with the Senator's office and ask whether they will take action.

GET STARTED!

The fastest and easiest way to learn about the Campaign, take action, and invite others to get involved!
You can:

- **Take AIUSA's online action:** calling on your university administration to stop complying with Trump's anti-rights demands calling on your university administration to stop complying with Trump's anti-rights demand. Encourage others to participate by sharing the action through social media, campus email lists, flyers, QR codes, and student organization networks.
- **Ask** at least five people to take action. You can choose from our menu of actions [here](#).

READY FOR MORE?

- **Sign up** to get started working on a Firewall for Freedom Resolution on your campus: After signing up you will get guidance and support from AIUSA staff and connect with college students across the U.S. also working on resolutions.
- **Educate** and Move People to Action! You can:
 - **Connect and build coalitions** with campus clubs, affinity groups, student associations, and other organizations already working on related issues.
 - **Email campus groups** to promote or endorse the Firewall campus resolution.
 - **Co-sponsor an event**, coordinate outreach, and share AIUSA's actions with your networks.
- **Partner with student media** to pitch a story, op-ed, interview or editorial board meeting (talking points [here](#) and [below](#))
- **Organize a Day of Action:** student email day to school leadership: This is a coordinated student email day where students and student groups send messages to campus leadership urging them to support and adopt the Firewall for Freedom campus resolution. **Spread awareness** through setting up automatic email responses that bring institutional attention about threats to freedom of expression and peaceful protest. (e.g., "Thank you for your email. I will respond ASAP. In the meantime, please

take a moment to learn about growing threats to students' Freedom of Expression and right to Peaceful Protest, and how the [Firewall for Freedom campus resolution](#) can help protect those rights)

- **Table** at a high-traffic campus events (new student/transfer orientation, prospective student tours, student council student events, club fairs etc.) You will need:
 - QR code to the Firewall for Freedom campus resolution landing page and for the Defend Freedom of Expression and Peaceful Protest webpage.
 - 1 pager explainer on the Firewall resolution
 - Merch incl stickers, posters or signs – request [HERE](#)
 - A sign that says “Should students be punished for free expression and peaceful protest? Add your name”
- **Research** community partners and institutional support systems (donors) to try to pull support outside of the institution.
- Pull out your **artistic skills** to make banners, posters, or draw chalk art to spread awareness.

TRANSFORM YOUR CAMPUS

You can:

- **Introduce the Firewall for Freedom Campus** resolution through student government. Follow the steps outlined [HERE](#).
- **Deliver petition signatures to university leadership** to show visible student and community support for adopting the Firewall for Freedom campus resolution.
- **Call on** (email/phone/mail) community partners and institutional support systems (donors) to try to pull support outside of the institution.
- **Host** a campuswide walkout/protest/sit-in. You need to have significant student support for this to be effective. The action should include:
 - Clear demand
 - Speakers from impacted community
 - A QR code linked to the most appropriate next step. If your group is actively pursuing the Firewall campus resolution, link to a sign-up form for students interested in joining the organizing team. If the group has not yet committed to the resolution, link instead to the relevant online action. [\[See HERE\]](#)
 - A media advisory and outreach to campus and local press. Contact us if you need media support.
- **Lead** a campuswide social justice fair with as many student club partners as possible.
- **Meet** with school administration to ask them to support the resolution.
- **Host a creative impact event**
 - **Funeral for Academic Freedom** Inspired by an initiative developed by SEAT, this symbolic campus action dramatizes what is at stake when students' rights and academic freedom are threatened: **How to organize it?**
 - Choose a visible campus location.
 - Invite students to wear black.
 - Create a symbolic coffin, memorial table, or empty chair display.
 - Print signs naming what is being threatened: “Free Expression,” “Peaceful Protest,” “Academic Freedom,” “Student Privacy,” “Inclusive Education.”
 - Ask students to read short eulogies for each right.
 - End by “reviving” academic freedom through action: Depending on where your campaign stands, invite students to sign or support the Firewall for Freedom resolution, mobilize support if it is facing pushback, or take another [relevant online action](#) to defend student rights and academic freedom.

- **Additional Creative Action Ideas:** The ideas below can also be adapted by student groups depending on their campus environment, organizing goals and available capacity:
 - Black tape on mouth for a week through classes (symbolizing silence on campus)
 - Human chain link around major buildings or campus
 - Material display (1e.g., 1 paper crane for arrested/detained/expelled protester at schools across the nation)
 - Photo Flash Mob: Invite students and community members to create a photo, drawing, or simple sign featuring the name or story of someone who has been impacted by attacks on freedom of expression. At a designated time, participants gather in a visible location on campus and hold up their signs together for a group photo or short video. The signs can also be temporarily displayed in an approved campus space, such as a student center, library, bulletin board, or designated protest area.
- **In order to make the action meaningful and respectful:**
 - Use publicly available stories or obtain consent before sharing someone's name, image, or personal experience.
 - Include a short message explaining how the person's experience connects to freedom of expression, peaceful protest, or another protected human right.
 - Add a QR code directing people to a related Amnesty action, campaign page, or resource – see [HERE](#)
- Share the group photo or video on social media and with the campus newspaper to raise awareness and encourage others to take action.

TALKING POINTS

Core Messages

- Our rights on campus are under attack, but students have the power to push back
- Crackdowns on student protestors are part of a broader trend of authoritarian practices designed to shrink people power, silence dissent, and target marginalized communities, especially immigrant and international students. We must stand in solidarity to protect the right to protest and defend the future of free expression on campus and beyond.
- Students have the right to speak out, organize, and protest peacefully without fear of retaliation, detention, deportation, or other punishment. Freedom of expression, association, and assembly are not privileges. They are human rights protected under international law and the U.S. Constitution. When these rights are under attack, it is our collective responsibility to defend them.
- No one should be ripped away from their community or family and sent to detention for exercising their right to protest; no one should be punished for peaceful protest; no one should be threatened for exercising their right to free speech; and no one should be deported for speaking out for human rights.

What is a Firewall for Freedom resolution?

- A student-government resolution: a formal expression of the student body's support for defending civil and human rights on campus.
- A resolution students can pass through student councils.
- Calls on the university leadership to refuse voluntary cooperation with federal or state authorities in ways that would violate constitutional rights (e.g. sharing data, enforcing punitive measures, deportation).
- Tells school leadership: "We refuse to let federal authorities use our campus to target, silence, or deport us."
- It's about protecting free speech, protest, academic freedom, and student privacy.

- The resolution is symbolic, but symbols matter: a formal resolution sends a public message and is a demand for accountability.
- The resolution is a first step; after passage, the campus can push for policy implementation (e.g. standing protocols, privacy safeguards) all outlined in the toolkit

What does the resolution ask of the university?

- Publicly defend the rights to freedom of expression, peaceful assembly, and freedom from discrimination.
- Do not voluntarily share student or campus community data with ICE or other federal agencies seeking to surveil or punish peaceful protest.
- Do not punish members of the campus community for participating in First Amendment–protected activities, including protest and organizing.
- Do not comply with unconstitutional requests that erode human rights, academic freedom, and campus safety

Why It Matters?

- Federal pressure on schools to crack down on student rights is increasing
- Students should never be punished for peaceful protest.
- Universities should be safe spaces for learning, belonging, and expression — not surveillance and censorship.
- This resolution is how we show school leaders what students stand for: dignity, freedom, and human rights.
- This resolution is a shield a campus-level rebuke to attempts at surveillance, censorship, and penalization of dissent

What's in the Toolkit?

- Steps to Passing a Resolution: how to work with student government and allies.
- Talking Points: ready-to-use arguments to defend student rights.
- Know Your Rights: guidance on free speech, protest, and student privacy.
- Campaigning Tools: petitions, sample op-eds, ideas for art actions, and Canva templates for social media.
- What's Next: ideas for keeping momentum whether the resolution passes or not (teach-ins, storytelling, protests, alumni support).

RESOURCES

- **Campaign Webpage**: Defend Free Expression and Peaceful Protest
- **Firewall For Freedom**: Campus Resolution Toolkit