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December 4, 2023

The Honorable Jonathan Holloway
President
Rutgers University
7 College Avenue, 2nd Floor
New Brunswick, NJ 08901

Dear President Holloway:

I am writing to express my strong concerns about the upcoming Rutgers-sponsored event on December 7 on your New Brunswick campus, entitled “Race, Liberation, and Palestine: A Conversation with Noura Erakat, Nick Estes, and Marc Lamont Hill.” On the surface, this discussion appears to be a valuable learning opportunity for students. The reality is that the Mellon Foundation’s Sawyer Seminar Series is only providing a platform for two well-known antisemites, Marc Lamont Hill and Nick Estes. Students deserve to feel safe on their campuses, and allowing these speakers to present their antisemitic, anti-Israel views will promote hate speech and exacerbate the potential for violence and attacks toward Rutgers’ Jewish students.

At a time when antisemitic acts and violence have been increasing precipitously across the country, especially on college campuses, including at Rutgers, providing these notorious antisemites a space to further promote their well-known, extreme views will further spread hate speech and increase the possibility of violence and harassment on campus.

Marc Lamont Hill, a former CNN commentator, was dismissed from the network following unacceptable statements denying Israel’s right to exist. At a 2018 United Nations gathering, Lamont Hill delivered a speech calling to free Palestine “from the river to the sea,” words universally understood to signal destruction of the State of Israel and the elimination of the Jewish people.¹ Another former employer, Temple University, condemned Lamont Hill’s speech, and was “regard[ed] as promoting violence” against Jews with language “that threaten[ed] the

¹ Jewish Journal, “ADL Responds to CNN Commentator Calling for a ‘Free Palestine from the River to the Sea,’” November 28, 2018, <https://jewishjournal.com/news/united-states/242732/cnn-commentator-shouldnt-shame-palestinians-resisting-israel>

existence of the State of Israel.”² Mr. Lamont Hill’s remarks have been labeled by prominent local and national Jewish organizations, including the Anti-Defamation League, as “virulent anti-Semitism and hate speech.”^{3 4}

Nick Estes has openly denounced the right of the State of Israel to exist, and has questioned Jewish historical connection to the land of Israel, labeling Israelis “Zionist settlers.”⁵ According to the Anti-Defamation League, Mr. Estes openly spreads long-standing troupes of antisemitism regularly “injecting the bigotry and antisemitic conspiracy theories into the discourse on the conflict.”⁶

Since October 7th, there have been more than 110 anti-Israel rallies on U.S. college campuses.⁷ Similar to other universities, Rutgers University has also permitted protesters to hide behind face masks, creating a culture of fear on campus. At Rutgers, anonymous protesters have gathered outside of the Chabad House, destroyed hostage posters, and verbally assaulted Jewish students. The Chabad Rabbi reported that Jewish students felt “physically afraid” to leave the building.⁸

The University’s Students for Justice in Palestine (SJP) chapter labeled Hamas’ October 7 terrorist attacks as “justified retaliation.”⁹ In November, a Rutgers student was charged with bias intimidation, terroristic threats, and false public alarm after posting on social media threats to kill an Israeli student from the AEPi fraternity.¹⁰ Jewish students on campus feel “devastated, and terrified.”¹¹

In accordance with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1965 (Title VI) and Executive Order 13899, administrators at colleges and universities across the country have an obligation to protect Jewish students against antisemitism, harassment, and intimidation from masked agitators and groups. Schools that fail to do so jeopardize their eligibility for federal funding.

² Temple University, Statement Condemning the Remarks of Professor Marc Lamont Hill, December 11, 2018, <https://news.temple.edu/announcements/2018-12-11/statement-condemning-remarks-professor-marc-lamont-hill>

³ Id.

⁴ CBS News, Temple University Professor Defends Himself over ‘Free Palestine From the River to the Sea’ Comment,” November 29, 2018, <https://www.cbsnews.com/philadelphia/news/marc-lamont-hill-temple-university-professor-defends-himself-over-free-palestine-from-river-to-sea-comment/>

⁵ Estes, Nick, “The Liberation of Palestine Represents an Alternative Path for Native Nations,” The Red Nation, September 7, 2019, <https://therednation.org/the-liberation-of-palestine-represents-an-alternative-path-for-native-nations/>

⁶ Id.

⁷ Anti-Defamation League, “ADL and OLAMI Join Forces to Address Antisemitism on College Campuses,” November 9, 2023, <https://www.adl.org/resources/press-release/adl-and-olami-join-forces-address-antisemitism-college-campuses>

⁸ NJ Spotlight News, “Student protesters demand Rutgers dump Israeli investments,” November 1, 2023, <https://www.njspotlightnews.org/video/student-protesters-demand-rutgers-dump-israeli-investments/>

⁹ The Washington Post, “At Colleges, Violence in Israel and Gaza Ignites a War of Words,” October 11, 2023, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/education/2023/10/10/colleges-react-israel-hamas-war/>

¹⁰ Jewish Link, “Rutgers Student Charged for Threatening to Kill an Israeli Student,” November 8, 2023, <https://jewishlink.news/rutgers-student-charged-for-threatening-to-kill-an-israeli-student/>

¹¹ The Washington Post, “At Colleges, Violence in Israel and Gaza Ignites a War of Words,” October 11, 2023, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/education/2023/10/10/colleges-react-israel-hamas-war/>

While differing views are a critical part of building cultural understanding, they cannot provide a bully pulpit for those who seek to divide others and spew hate. The first amendment does not give students the right to bully, intimidate, and instill fear onto other students. If the University's goal is to promote mutual understanding and bring students together, it will fail so long as antisemites and anti-Israel advocates are given a sanctioned platform on your campus to promote hatred. Thank you for your attention to this matter and I look forward to your timely response.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Josh Gottheimer". The signature is stylized with a large initial "J" and a cursive "G".

Josh Gottheimer
MEMBER OF CONGRESS