



May 15, 2024

The Honorable Christopher Wray
Director
Federal Bureau of Investigation
935 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20535-0001

Dear Director Wray,

On behalf of our higher education associations, we are writing today to express our concern regarding the recent restructuring of the Academic Liaison program at the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI).

In April 2018, the higher education community sent a letter expressing concerns with the dissolution of the National Security Higher Education Advisory Board (NSHEAB) and the need for regular conversations between the higher education community and FBI leadership to discuss national security issues that intersect with higher education.¹ Following that letter, the FBI established an academic liaison, one point of contact for higher education, within the Office of Private Sector (OPS) to serve as a conduit for the higher education community across the Bureau's work, including the Counterterrorism Division, the Counterintelligence Division, Weapons of Mass Destruction Directorate, Cyber Division, Criminal Investigation Division, as well as the FBI field offices.

Since 2018, the working relationship between the FBI OPS and the higher education community has led to a deeper understanding of the national security concerns for institutions of higher education, as well as greater access and improved communication between academia and the FBI, from leadership down to the field offices. This successful partnership resulted in several major coordinated events, including 2018 and 2019 FBI academia summits at FBI headquarters; several regional meetings with institutions of higher education; and classified briefings for college and university presidents. The partnership also led to coordination with the federal research agencies, the interagency working group at the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy, and the National Academies' National Science, Technology, and Security Roundtable. In turn, this has also led to support and recognition from the U.S. Congress and policymakers on the positive impact this partnership has had for both institutions of higher education and the FBI in opening lines of communication and providing vital information on threats to academia, especially to the security of our research.

Although this partnership has been successful, the FBI recently decided to move the academic liaison role from OPS to the Counterintelligence Division. The higher education community has had a close working relationship with the assistant director of Counterintelligence but has also worked with the Cyber Division regarding cyber threats, Counterterrorism regarding threats to

¹ April 24, 2018, letter from higher education associations to Director Wray, re: NSHEAB:
<https://www.acenet.edu/Documents/Letter-FBI-NSHEAB.pdf>

campuses, and Weapons of Mass Destruction regarding biomedical threats. For instance, in 2022 our Historically Black Colleges and Universities received a set of bomb threats. The academic liaison coordinated a briefing call for the associations, as well as the impacted institutions of higher education, with the coordinating divisions of the FBI. Our institutions have recently asked for similar outreach regarding antisemitism threats on our campuses but have been stymied by not having a coordinating entity that can work across all divisions and directorates of the FBI.

Given the success of the Academic Liaison program, it is unclear to us why it has recently been moved to the Counterintelligence Division, and we are concerned that this will limit the effectiveness of the program to coordinate across FBI divisions. We appreciate that each field office now has an academic liaison and we recognize that each field office is different. The Academic Liaison program has acted as a clearinghouse to share and standardize best practices. To this end, we appreciated the opportunity last year that representatives from our associations had to participate in the Academia Coordinator Workshop coordinated by OPS.

For these reasons, we urge FBI leadership to reconsider this decision and restore the coordinating function of the Academic Liaison program to allow for one single FBI point of contact across the entire Bureau. We believe this is important to ensure that the Academic Liaison program remain central to the work with the higher education associations and larger academic community. Specifically, we request that you move the Academic Liaison program back to a position within the Bureau where it can authoritatively work across all FBI divisions and directorates. We also urge the Bureau to clearly communicate where the Academic Liaison program ultimately exists in the organizational structure and how and to whom our higher education organizations and the institutions we represent can effectively communicate with the Bureau on the full range of issues, potential threats, and concerns they may face.

We thank you for your attention to this letter and we look forward to continuing to work with the FBI to address national security concerns impacting our institutions of higher education.

Sincerely,



Ted Mitchell
President, American Council on Education



Barbara R. Snyder
President, Association of American Universities



Mark Becker
President, Association of Public and
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Matt Owens,
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