

# AAUP

American Association of University Professors

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*Academic Freedom for a Free Society*

Chairman Lieberman  
Senate Committee on Homeland Security  
706 Hart Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

December 5, 2007

Dear Chairman Lieberman:

The American Association of University Professors (AAUP) has followed HR 1955, the “Violent Radicalization and Homegrown Terrorism Prevention Act of 2007” with interest. While we support the idea of taking a thoughtful and studied approach to understanding the roots of terrorism, we find some of the bill’s language troubling. We agree with Congress on the need to understand what prompts violent acts in order to protect our nation more effectively. But in the wake of recent violations of individual rights, we would like to emphasize, as we did in our 2003 report “Academic Freedom and National Security in a Time of Crisis,” that it is both possible and vital to protect our national security while simultaneously safeguarding the civil liberties of U.S. citizens and residents. Specifically, we are concerned about overly broad definitions in HR 1955 that could affect our ability to speak and teach freely, the lack of a clear distinction between ideas and actions, and references to the Internet that could be interpreted as an invitation for further illegal surveillance of U.S. citizens and residents.

As the leading professional association of college and university faculty, we embrace the emphasis on taking a cooperative and scholarly approach to addressing pressing issues. However, as teachers and scholars, the overly broad definition of “violent radicalization” presented in the bill gives us cause for concern. HR 1955 defines violent radicalization as “the process of adopting or promoting an extremist belief system for the purpose of facilitating ideologically based violence to advance political, religious, or social change” [Sec. 899A.(2)]. This vague definition could affect our profession if classroom discussions of social change—change which may in some cases have been brought about by violence—are interpreted as advocacy of those movements or ideas, rather than historical fact. Any measure that seeks to prevent “violent radicalization” must state clearly that the teaching and study of various ideologies and social movements are not tantamount to advocacy.

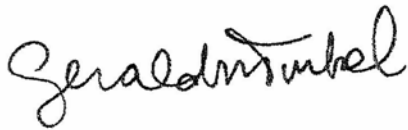
The need to prevent organized groups or individuals from carrying out violent actions is indisputable. The AAUP believes that it is essential to protect citizens without compromising the freedoms that comprise core American values. In this regard, the language [Section 899B.(3)] in the Act referencing the role of the Internet in facilitating radicalization is also too vague, and holds potential to encourage infringement upon free speech and other rights. In view of the current administration’s deeply troubling domestic

surveillance and warrantless wiretapping of U.S. citizens, the language in this section could be interpreted to encourage further intrusion into citizens' private communications. We are aware of the bill's assertion [Section 899F.(a)] that civil rights and liberties need to be respected, but given recent government infringements of these rights we urge a stronger statement of commitment to free speech and privacy.

The AAUP believes that stronger language upholding fundamental rights, particularly free speech and privacy, as well as revised definitions that focus on actions rather than ideas will ultimately strengthen this legislation by making crystal clear exactly which American values and norms are so worth defending.

If we can provide further information on this issue, please do not hesitate to contact John W. Curtis, Director of Research and Public Policy in our national office, at the address referenced above.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Gerald M. Turkel". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Gerald M. Turkel, Ph.D.

Chair, AAUP Committee on Government Relations

Professor of Sociology and Legal Studies, University of Delaware