

July 29, 2025

Chancellor Félix V. Matos Rodríguez
The City University of New York
205 East 42nd Street
New York City, NY 10017

Dean Natalie Gomez-Valez
Professor of Law
The City University of New York
2 Court Square
Long Island, NY 11101

Re: Professor Ramzi Kassem and Academic Freedom

Dear Chancellor Matos Rodríguez and Dean Gomez-Valez:

We write on behalf of the American Association of University Professors - National ("AAUP National") in support of Professor Ramzi Kassem and in defense of basic principles of academic freedom and shared governance.

As you know, in a July 2025 hearing of the U.S. House Committee on Education and the Workforce, Representative Elise Stefanik stated that CUNY should discipline or terminate Professor Ramzi Kassem for his representation of Mahmoud Khalil. Representative Stefanik insinuated that Professor Kassem's representation of Mr. Khalil somehow amounted to anti-semitism and contributed to what she characterized as the "spread of anti-semitism" at CUNY.

These accusations are outrageous. Any discipline leveled against Professor Kassem for his representation of Mr. Khalil would violate AAUP standards on academic freedom and tenure and the terms of CUNY's faculty labor contract. Even more critically, such discipline would contravene Professor Kassem's constitutionally-protected speech and association. Federal courts have interpreted the First Amendment to protect the right of faculty to engage in an "independent and uninhibited exchange of ideas" as well as the right of the university to engage in "autonomous decisionmaking" free of legislative or, for that matter, judicial control.¹ Courts have interpreted the First Amendment to prohibit efforts by the government to "usurp" the right of academic institutions to "determine [for themselves] who may teach" or "what may be taught."² Professor Kassem's representation of Mr. Khalil as part of his clinical practice falls squarely within these protections.

¹ *Regents of Univ. of Michigan v. Ewing*, 474 U.S. 214, 226 (1985).

² *Sweezy*, 354 U.S. at 263 (Frankfurter J., concurring) (recognizing the necessity of "governmental intervention [from] the intellectual life of a university" and describing "the four essential freedoms of a university" as the freedom "to determine for itself on academic grounds who may teach, what may be taught, how it shall be taught, and who may be admitted to study"); *Keyishian*, 385 U.S. at 589 (holding

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As the Trump administration cynically uses civil rights laws and funding threats to brow beat universities into ideological submission, public institutions have heightened legal obligations and ethical responsibilities to protect constitutional and professional freedoms. It is the AAUP National's position that rather than discipline, Professor Kassem's scholarship, research, and legal advocacy (performed with and through the Creating Law Enforcement Accountability and Responsibility or CLEAR clinic, which he founded at CUNY Law) should be lauded by the university for working to uphold the rule of law.

The National AAUP stands in staunch support of Professor Ramzi Kassem's academic and constitutional freedoms, and we will continue to closely watch CUNY's defense of its faculty. Please do not hesitate to contact us should you have any questions.

Sincerely,



Veena Dubal
General Counsel
AAUP National

p.p. 

Todd Wolfson
President
AAUP National

CC: Derek Davis, Senior Vice Chancellor for Legal Affairs and General Counsel; Senior Associate Dean for Clinical Programs Lisa Davis; David Baluarte, Senior Associate Dean for Academic Affairs

that loyalty oath requirement for university professors mandated by state law will unconstitutionally "chill... the exercise of vital First Amendment rights").