

January 26, 2026

Via email and physical mail

Domenico Grasso, President, University of Michigan
3190 Ruthven Building
1109 Geddes Ave.
Ann Arbor, MI 48109
grasso@umich.edu

Dear President Grasso,

The AAUP (American Association of University Professors) writes to you with deep concern regarding expanding surveillance practices at the University of Michigan. We are concerned first by UM's installation of approximately 1,200 new and powerful surveillance cameras across campus, most concerningly in public spaces like the Diag and the Law Quad¹, as part of the [Security Technology Enhancement Project \(STEP\)](#). Secondly, we are concerned by the university's adoption of [a new standard practice guide \(SPG\), numbered 510.02](#), which strips away many of the protections that had earlier guided the use of surveillance cameras on campus under SPG 606.01.

Both the content and the process of UM's actions undermine two core principles of the AAUP, namely academic freedom and shared governance. First, the University of Michigan's push for surveillance cameras on campus is antithetical to the [AAUP's long-established standards regarding academic freedom and electronic communications](#). Of particular relevance:

Academic freedom is dependent on a researcher's ability not only to gain access to information but also to explore ideas and knowledge without fear of surveillance or interference. (43)

AAUP shared governance standards provide that formulation and implementation policies governing technologies should be developed by faculty members through representative institutions of shared governance (53). We note that both the widespread deployment of surveillance cameras and the implementation of SPG 510.02 occurred despite the adoption of a [faculty government resolution calling on the university to put in place rules to delimit and contain the rapidly growing technologies of surveillance](#) and in

¹ See MLaw-ACLU Open Letter to the University of Michigan Board of Regents, June 11, 2025. <https://drive.google.com/file/d/11QclbGTq9XcQcvu8i-LdNzLAhr3OwQmL/view>.

contradiction to the procedures laid out in SPG 606.01, in violation of another core AAUP standard that

any new policy or major revision of an existing policy should be subject to approval by a broader faculty body such as a faculty senate. (55)

The university's former SPG 606.01 mandated the formation of an oversight committee of faculty, students, and administrators who were charged with (a) reviewing and revising the SPG and related practices and procedures, (b) reviewing and approving amendments to the policy, and (c) providing periodic updates to the UM community about camera systems in the spirit of transparency. For years, the administration defied that policy and did not appoint an oversight committee. And contrary to the former SPG provision, the administration did away with that provision altogether without any input. Although the oversight committee existed under the old policy to ensure accountability and transparency, there is nothing in the new policy that serves this function. We appreciate that your office last summer expressed interest in convening the STEP committee to consult on the use of these cameras, but that committee is not a formal oversight committee. It is clear that the newly formed advisory committee has no ability to review, revise, or approve changes to camera policy as was previously required by SPG 606.01.

In addition to these procedural concerns, the new SPG 510.02 reduces the protections that the campus community can expect with regards to surveillance. For example, the former policy said,

The university has a significant responsibility to take appropriate steps to protect personal privacy and civil liberties when it operates security cameras systems. [. . .] [S]uch installations must not impinge on or unduly constrain the academic freedom or civil liberties of community members or their freedom of assembly and expression.

The new policy replaces that language with a less stringent standard, requiring only that DPSS not place cameras "with the intent to chill, compel, prevent, or punish speech or association." Thus, under the new standard, as long as the Division of Public Safety and Security (DPSS) does not *intend* to chill speech, there is no violation of policy even if the placement of the camera—for example, in the Diag—actually does chill speech and diminish academic freedom.

The new policy also opens the possibility of audio recording on campus: As SPG 606.01 said, "Security camera systems should not enable audio recording," with certain limited exceptions requiring a written rationale after consultation among UM's executive vice president, the chief financial officer, DPSS, and the general counsel. This provision was eliminated under the new policy, where all decisions on matters are simply delegated to DPSS. Furthermore, the old policy said that the recordings and recorded images must be erased within thirty days unless needed for court proceedings and other limited reasons. There is no such protection in the new policy.

We call on the University of Michigan to take actions that demonstrate its commitment to AAUP-supported principles of academic freedom and shared governance. Specifically, we ask the university to:

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1. Reinstate SPG 606.01, which was abolished in violation of university policy and the principle of shared governance.
2. Form an oversight committee to ensure any use of surveillance is consistent with university values and regulations, as required by SPG 606.01.
3. Fund a study on whether surveillance cameras have been effective in deterring and solving violent crimes at universities and in public spaces so the oversight committee can take these findings into account when approving policies around surveillance cameras.
4. Remove the surveillance cameras on the Diag, the center of free speech on campus, because surveillance chills academic freedom, freedom of speech, and freedom of expression.
5. Remove the surveillance camera on the Law Quad because these cameras can surveille students in their residences, in violation of their privacy rights.
6. Place a moratorium on the installation of more surveillance cameras on campus until an oversight committee is convened and has engaged in informed and evidence-based deliberations.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Todd Wolfson". The signature is stylized and cursive.

Todd Wolfson, AAUP President

Mia McIver, AAUP Executive Director

Britt Paris, Chair, AAUP ad hoc Committee on AI in Academic Professions

Julie Boland, President, University of Michigan Ann Arbor Chapter of the AAUP

Derek R. Peterson, Chair, University of Michigan Faculty Senate