

May 8, 2017

Statement on the UNC Center for Civil Rights

Founded in 2001 by the legendary African American civil rights attorney Julius Chambers, the UNC Center for Civil Rights brings together students and faculty, as well as policy experts and practicing attorneys, to advocate for the poor and for racial and ethnic minorities. It focuses on legal and social issues in the areas of education, housing, community development, economic justice, and voting rights.

One of the critical functions of the center is to train students by giving them hands on experience with litigation. Clearly the work of the center, including its litigation work, is consistent with the mission of the University of North Carolina, of which it is a part. UNC's mission statement recognizes the value of public service in that it contributes "to the solution of societal problems and enriches the quality of life in the State." Efforts to prevent the center from engaging in litigation represents a challenge to both the principles of academic freedom and shared governance.

For more than one hundred years, the AAUP has stood for these principles because we believe that the primary mission of higher education is to serve the common good. Those who wish to curtail the activities of the center are more concerned with serving those with privilege than with protecting the rights of students and educating the public about issues of social and economic justice. The AAUP believes that externally funded centers must be free to sponsor curricular and co-curricular activities and provide services to the public, and not be limited by having to pass an ideological litmus test.

Therefore, as president of the AAUP, I call on the UNC board of governors to cease interfering with the educational mission of the center and allow it to continue its work, which is consistent with the mission of the University of North Carolina and serves the common good.

Rudy Fichtenbaum
President, AAUP