

From: **Coalition for a Diverse Harvard** <harvardcoalition@gmail.com>

Date: Mon, Feb 24, 2025

Subject: **A Call from Alumni to Stand Up for Diversity**

President Alan M. Garber

Provost John F. Manning

Harvard Corporation Senior Fellow Penny Pritzker

Dear President Garber, Provost Manning, and Corporation Senior Fellow Pritzker:

The Coalition for a Diverse Harvard, comprising more than 2,400 alumni, students, faculty, staff, and administrators, urges you to stand up to recent executive branch actions in this moment of peril for democracy, scholarship, and the freedom to learn. As the President and Fellows recently [wrote](#):

“Diversity within the University community advances the academic purposes of the University, and an affirmative action policy is essential to achieving such diversity. The University endorses the goals of equal employment opportunity and affirmative action as supportive of University values and of the values of a democratic and pluralistic society.”

Harvard cannot and should not preemptively submit to federal administration directives to dismantle higher education as we know it. As leading legal scholars [explain](#), these directives run counter to legal precedent and are “intend[ed] to dismantle our civil rights infrastructures and erode the autonomy and independence of institutions of higher education.” Harvard must be a leader among institutions of higher education in demonstrating its commitment to diversity in pursuit of academic excellence—by holding steadfast to its long-held values and initiatives.

On February 14, 2025, the U.S. Department of Education’s Office for Civil Rights sent a [Dear Colleague letter](#) that radically misinterprets the law and threatens to cut funding to educational institutions that use “race in decisions pertaining to admissions, hiring, promotion, compensation, financial aid, scholarships, prizes, administrative support, discipline, housing, graduation ceremonies, and all other aspects of student, academic, and campus life.” This letter does not create or change the law; it is designed to instill fear, spread confusion, and create a chilling effect.

By law and consistent with its essential values, Harvard must ensure that every student has an equal opportunity to thrive. Harvard’s [mission](#) explicitly requires “a diverse living environment, where students live with people who are studying different topics, who come from different walks of life and have evolving identities...” [Harvard](#) also “strive[s] to create an environment that values diversity, promotes an inclusive culture, and establishes a profound sense of belonging for each member of our community,” and [reaffirmed these values](#) in the wake of the 2023 Supreme Court decision in *FFA v. Harvard*. As it did then, Harvard must again stand up against efforts to undo decades of progress and proactively fight to preserve civil rights laws.

As [clarified](#) by the Legal Defense Fund, “Diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility programs are not preferences or quotas.” They instead reaffirm the fundamental principle that deep and transformative teaching,

learning, and research depend upon a community comprising people of many backgrounds, perspectives, and experiences. Indeed, Harvard's diversity is one of its greatest assets. As President Garber has stated, "Our diversity has enriched every facet of the work that we do at Harvard, and will continue to strengthen our community in the years to come."

We call on you to actively and vocally support diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility initiatives at Harvard at this critical juncture in higher education. As leaders of the University, it is imperative that you fight back to preserve the mission and values of a Harvard education. This includes decisively and publicly rejecting the suggestion that any supports or events (e.g., graduation ceremonies and affinity groups) that create a sense of belonging for people from historically marginalized groups must be banned.

The need for Harvard to speak up and take action is all the more urgent at a time when many in the Harvard community feel deeply dispirited by recent events on campus and nationally. Contrary to promoting a sense of belonging among all, the following developments have elevated concern that Harvard is retreating from its mission to "inspir[e] every member of Harvard's community to strive towards a more just, fair and promising world": the departure of President Gay; the appointments of the President and the Provost without searches; the alarming 22% drop in African American students and 50% drop in Native American students at the College this year (the decreases may be sharper given that fewer students are reporting race); the fall from 43 first-year Black students at Harvard Law School last year to just 19 this year, the lowest number since the 1960s; the firings and disarray in the Legacy of Slavery Project; the harsh restrictions on speech and protest and resulting discipline; and the continuing failure to establish an Ethnic Studies concentration and department.

We urge you to stand up to the executive branch actions to eliminate all race-conscious policies and curriculum, and we look forward to working in partnership with the University to support this effort.

Sincerely yours,

Itzel, Emily, Jane, Jeannie, Juhwan, Kristin, Margaret, and Michael

Itzel Vasquez-Rodriguez, Emily Van Dyke, Jane Sujen Bock, Jeannie Park, Juhwan Seo, Kristin Penner, Margaret Chin, and Michael Williams
for the Board of Directors, [Coalition for a Diverse Harvard](#)

cc:

Chief Diversity and Inclusion Officer Sherri Ann Charleston
Harvard Corporation Members
Harvard Overseers
Harvard University Deans