



OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT
BROWN UNIVERSITY

CHRISTINA H. PAXSON, PRESIDENT

Sent via Electronic Mail

April 29, 2024

Dear BUCC Members,

Thank you for attending the special Brown University Community Council meeting on April 25, 2024, and discussing and voting on two advisory motions, the first that students be permitted to present their proposal for divestment to the Corporation of Brown University for its consideration, and the second that the charges against students who were arrested for trespass in University Hall on December 11, 2023, be dropped. The quality of the discussion reflected the time BUCC members put into thinking about the issues and reviewing the documents. Although both motions passed (one 17-13-1 and the second 17-9-5), the fact that both votes were quite divided reflects the range of opinions within the Brown community on the difficult issues we are facing.

The violence affecting families and communities in the Middle East is truly devastating. It has prompted many across the country to call for meaningful change, while also raising real issues about how best to accomplish this. I am writing to let you know how I intend to proceed on the two motions arising from these challenges.

The first motion requested that “a group of five students conducting activism for divestment be allowed to present a case for and resolution for divestment from the Israeli occupation of Palestinian Territory to the Brown Corporation at its next meeting.” I have discussed this with Corporation leadership since last week’s meeting. They have decided that, provided that the encampment is peacefully brought to an end within the next few days and is not replaced with any other encampments or unauthorized protest activity (any protests violating University policies related to time, place or manner) this academic year, they will invite five students representing the current encampment activity and a small group of faculty members to speak with a similarly-sized group of Corporation members, including the Chancellor and the chair of the Investment Committee, about their arguments for divestment.

This meeting would occur during the upcoming Corporation meetings in May, though it would not place divestment as an action item for the Corporation’s business meeting. The inclusive process that recognizes the rights of any community member to bring a divestment proposal formally to the Corporation for its consideration remains unchanged and accessible at any time. This rare exception to offer any form of meeting outside of that formal process reflects the extraordinary nature of the circumstances. Students have told me that, more than anything, they want to be listened to. This unprecedented offer of a meeting with a subset of Brown Corporation

members represents a constructive and good-faith effort to respond to the students' desire to be heard.

My hope is that students participating in the encampment will accept this offer to meet (which will be communicated to them just after you receive this letter), and that the meeting will allow for a full and frank exchange of views. Furthermore, ending the encampment will make it possible to begin the very involved process of preparing the campus for the tens of thousands of community members who are preparing to travel to participate in the singular milestone of Commencement and Reunion Weekend. Preparations already have been somewhat delayed due to the encampment.

The second motion recommended that "Brown University drops any and all charges against students arrested during the 12/11/23 sit-in calling on the corporation to consider a divestment proposal." This relates to the 41 students arrested for trespass after refusing to leave a secure building after hours. I must respectfully decline this recommendation. Just as the University did not drop charges against more than 250 students who trespassed in University Hall in 1992, it would be a mistake to do so now. I respect the conviction and passion of these students that prompted them to make the informed choice to be arrested. The practice of civil disobedience means accepting the consequences of decisions on matters of conscience.

I appreciate the BUCC's commitment to thoughtful consideration of issues of concern for the Brown community, which is in alignment with this group's charge. Thank you for your advice throughout the year. For those of you who are Brown students, faculty and staff, I hope the end of your semester goes well. And I wish all of you a restful summer.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'C. H. Paxson', written in a cursive style.

Christina H. Paxson
President