

A dozen Ohio university presidents sign letter against Trump's 'political interference'

By **Cole Behrens**
Columbus Dispatch

A dozen private Ohio college and university presidents have signed onto a letter against "the unprecedented government overreach and political interference" in higher education, joining hundreds of other school presidents across the country.

The letter, published by the The American Association of Colleges and Universities, has over 300 signatures from college and university presidents urging the federal government to work toward "constructive engagement" with higher education institutions.

"The price of abridging the defining freedoms of American higher education will be paid by our students and our society," the letter says. "On behalf of our current and future students, and all who work at and benefit from our institutions, we call for constructive engagement that improves our institutions and serves our republic."

The letter also said that "American institutions of higher learning are essential to American prosperity and serve as productive partners with government in promoting the common good."

"We are open to constructive reform and do not oppose legitimate government oversight," the letter said. "However, we must oppose undue government intrusion in the lives of those who learn, live, and work on our campuses. We will always seek effective and fair financial practices, but we must reject the coercive use of public research funding."

The letter is the latest salvo in a growing conflict between the Trump administration and higher education institutions. On April 22, [Harvard University](#) sued the Trump administration, accusing it of unlawfully threatening the school's "academic independence" and "pathbreaking research," according to USA Today.

The lawsuit comes after the Trump administration announced it was [freezing \\$2.2 billion in funding](#) to the elite school, which resisted demands to ban masks and diversity, equity and inclusion programs.

And on April 23, [The Wall Street Journal](#) reported that President Donald Trump planned to sign an executive order to change the college accreditation process in order to combat "ideological overreach" on college campuses.

While a dozen private Ohio colleges and university presidents have signed the letter as of April 23, no public school presidents have signed. Public university presidents in other states have signed the letter, however, including University of Michigan President Santa J. Ono.

Ohio State University did not immediately respond to requests for comment as to whether President Ted Carter intended to sign the letter.

The AAC&U is still accepting signatures from current leaders of colleges, universities, and scholarly societies.

One of the signatories, Otterbein University President John Comerford said that "government intrusion, from the left or the right, into this freedom isn't just an attack on universities, it is an attack on democracy."

"Universities must be open to all mainstream ideas," Comerford said in a statement. "Otterbein is proud to be such a place. Students of all backgrounds, identities, and viewpoints are welcome at Otterbein and most universities."

Comerford acknowledged that while "higher education is not perfect and places like Otterbein are working to improve."

"The path to change is not central government control," he said.

Which Ohio college and university presidents have signed the letter?

As of April 23, the following university leaders have signed the petition

- Carmen Twillie Ambar, President, Oberlin College

- John Comerford, President, Otterbein University
- Melanie Corn, President, Columbus College of Art & Design
- Jane Fernandes, President, Antioch College
- Michael L. Frandsen, President, Wittenberg University
- Robert H. Huntington, President, Heidelberg University
- David L. Kaufman, President, Capital University
- Julie Kornfeld, President, Kenyon College
- Anne E. McCall, President, The College of Wooster
- Eric F. Spina, President, University of Dayton
- Matthew P. vandenBerg, President, Ohio Wesleyan University
- Adam Weinberg, President, Denison University