

Statement on the DHS Abduction at Columbia University

February 27, 2026

The Sanctuary Campus Network and our coalition partners condemn the Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) abduction of a Columbia University student from their dormitory, and urge all universities and colleges to protect all members of their communities from the reckless and dangerous tactics by federal agencies. These actions punish targeted individuals and spread fear, thus violating the Constitution and the principles of open inquiry, freedom of association, and other pillars of education and democracy.

Columbia University issued a public statement responding to the abduction that reiterated the fact that law enforcement is prohibited from entering nonpublic areas of university property without a judicial warrant or subpoena and reminded community members to call campus police and not allow agents entry. Columbia claimed that the DHS agents used "misrepresentation" to gain access to the building.

Law enforcement agencies, including DHS, Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), and Customs and Border Protection (CBP), have long used ruses and lies to circumvent constitutional Fourth Amendment protections against unreasonable searches and seizures. The Sanctuary Campus Network (SCN) calls on universities and colleges to broadly alert and educate its community of these dangers and to put in place clear policies to protect students, faculty, and workers. In the meanwhile, SCN will act to disseminate information and share ways that others have fought back.

The fact that such a ruse worked at Columbia marks a failure of training and communications by the university to campus workers, students, and faculty. Given the ubiquity and necessity of Know Your Rights training and resources, this failure is unconscionable and has led to the disappearance of a student. SCN offers any person, organization, or higher education institution KYR resources and training (resources below).

We must also remember that this is not the first instance of a DHS abduction on Columbia's campus. In previous instances, Columbia failed to issue any public condemnation of the DHS. Indeed, the Columbia administration colluded with the federal government to effect the abduction from university housing and detention in Louisiana of Palestinian and permanent resident Mahmoud Khalil in retaliation for his leadership of the student movement against genocide. [Khalil still faces deportation](#). DHS also tried to deport Columbia undergraduate and permanent resident [Yunseo Chung](#) for her participation in the encampments. Ranjani Srinivasan, a doctoral student and Indian national who had supported Gaza solidarity activism on campus in 2024 was [publicly forced to "self-deport"](#) when she was targeted by DHS at her Columbia campus housing, and argues that the university "absolutely cooperated with ICE," putting all international students at risk. The DHS has maintained a perimeter presence around Columbia's main campus following the Gaza encampments. We cannot overlook the invited presence of DHS agents onto Columbia's property and surrounds, even if the university did not directly collude in this morning's abduction as it has before against pro-Palestine students.

We are relieved the detained student has been released due to the pressure of political and popular organized resistance to DHS, ICE, and collaborating universities. We must sustain such resistance to win in the short and long term.

With the alarming precedent this abduction from university housing sets, we encourage faculty, staff, and students to demand the following:

- Issue public statements condemning the abduction of any student, staff or faculty by the DHS.
- Provide numbers and any legally permissible details of any students, faculty or staff who are being detained by DHS.
- Make and update public statements on how campus safety departments are being trained to handle ICE on campus.
- Require mandatory Know Your Rights training for all campus workers and students, similar to required Title IX and security training,

We also know that we cannot rely on universities, even ones that don't collude with DHS, to protect our campus communities from such violent harm. We must build our own networks and relationships to ensure each other's well-being. The following are steps anyone can take to protect their communities in the absence of support from their university administrations:

- Provide KYR trainings
 - [KYR Essentials Slide Deck](#) – Adapt to your local conditions. Can be presented in class or meetings in 15 minutes.
 - [KYR Comprehensive](#) – This training takes at least 60 minutes.
- [Mark private spaces](#) on campus, including classrooms, offices, and residence halls with privacy signs.
- [Canvass campus offices, dormitories, and shared spaces with KYR information](#). (Visit campus spaces with an information packet and walk people through its contents, explaining why it's important for everyone to know their rights to ensure community safety.)
- [Join the Drop ICE campaign](#). This campaign reviews/teaches the fundamentals of organizing and provides coaching and clear strategy. It is a great way for ordinary folks to learn these essential skills and build the movement to Drop ICE from our campuses.

The Sanctuary Campus Network and its coalition partners are organizing to protect our communities, our campuses, and our democracy. [Join us](#).

Endorsed by the Coalition for Action in Higher Education, National Faculty and Staff for Justice in Palestine, Scholars for Social Justice, Jewish Voices for Peace Academic Council, and AAUP 6741