

**September 2nd, 2020**

Dear Chancellor Rebecca Blank, Vice Chancellor Laurent Heller, Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs Lori Reeser, President Tommy Thompson, Provost Karl Scholz, Chief Diversity Officer Cheryl Gattens, and UW Board of Regents:

We are the Abolition Geographies Collective, a group of graduate students at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. We formed in the midst of a summer of nation-wide uprisings against anti-Black police violence and systemic racism to organize for a campus that is safe for all by defunding and abolishing the UWPD. Here we present our statement and demands for the university to divest from violence and invest in the lives, futures, and safety of Black, Indigenous, and of color students, faculty, and staff.

We find that the administration's current commitment to anti-racism, publicized over the past few months, is performative at best and hostile and deadly at worst. Anti-racism, especially at a predominantly white institution, requires a deep collective commitment to unlearning past practices and learning new ones, enacting structural and budgetary changes rather than merely symbolic ones. You may say that this takes time, but many of us are not afforded that time. We cannot wait for those, including white liberals, who do not directly experience the inherent violence of policing, to acknowledge and understand how high the stakes are.

Between the day we published the attached letter on Juneteenth and today, too many more lives have been lost.

Jacob Blake. Tony McDade. Dontre Hamilton. Sylville Smith. Tony Terrell Robinson. George Floyd. Breonna Taylor. Ahmaud Arbery. Nina Pop. Tamir Rice. Aiyana Stanley-Jones. Trayvon Martin. Sandra Bland. Oscar Grant. Eric Garner. Janisha Fonville. Philando Castille. Pamela Turner. Walter Scott. Michael Brown. Kiwi Herring. Kawaski Trawick. Stephon Clark. Alteria Woods. Terence Crutcher. Mya Hall. Freddie Gray. Sam Dubose. Jason Washington. Miciah Lee. Aleah Jenkins. Demetrius Dubose. Siaki Ramon del Rio. Mark Adkins. Alfred Olango. Marshawn Washington. Bernedette Grantling. Frederick Jefferson. James Lacy. LaMontez Jones.

And let us not forget the COVID-19 deaths caused by government inaction and our failed health care system. As of August 31st, over [180,000](#) Americans have died from COVID-19. According to the COVID Tracking Project, Black Americans are dying at a rate of nearly three times as that of white people.<sup>1</sup> These crises are inseparable.

In light of this, a [“Smart Restart”](#) is unconscionable. It signals a blatant disregard for Black life, the uninsured and immuno-compromised, and those most vulnerable in our society. Further, it is contradictory to claim “care” for students while policing and punishing them on and off campus. We already know that using police to shore up the University's failed policy decisions will result in intensified targeting of Black,

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<sup>1</sup> <https://covidtracking.com/race/dashboard>

Indigenous and students of color (BIPOC), as the UWPD already disproportionately targets these students on campus.<sup>2</sup> This showcases how UWPD Police Chief Kristen Roman's [recent statements](#) are meaningless. In spite of expressing remorse over the murder of George Floyd and commitments to improve relations with communities of color, UWPD and MPD have mobilized to target and criminalize students for the consequences of the administration's irresponsible and racist re-opening plan, which have already failed at universities across the U.S. We refuse to believe that individual students are the ones primarily responsible for the illness and death caused by the spread of COVID-19 — the blame is on you.

As campus prepares for reopening, people continue to die. We remember and honor Joseph Rosenbaum and Anthony Huber, murdered in Kenosha for demanding justice for Jacob Blake. As we learn from the uprising there, white supremacist and fascist vigilantes around the Midwest flock to cities to instill what they see as "law-and-order." Such illegal vigilantes have received support from the Kenosha Police Department, the National Guard, Federal Agents, and the President of the United States. The University of Wisconsin is not immune to this sort of white supremacist violence as we know from racial hostility incidents [here](#) and at other [Midwest campuses](#). As the movement for Black Lives grows, will the UWPD be deployed to repress it in tandem with a growing fascist presence nationally, or can we defund the department and use those resources to invest in Black futures? We insist on the latter.

We support and join our peer institutions, Black faculty, students, and staff in their demands across the country for University divestments from the police state and the investment in Black safety and lives. We actively support and are in solidarity with the historical and present work and organizing of the [BSU](#), [Student Inclusion Coalition](#), the [TAA](#), [LINK](#), and your [BIPOC student population](#). Your dismissal of our peers' and community members' needs and demands reveals your commitment to upholding white supremacy on this campus and your placement of profit over lives. And we will continue to push for change. Again, here we deliver our own demands, centered on valuing Black and BIPOC life, where we identify Abolition as the necessary framework to create and sustain change. We demand a response by **October 1st, 2020**.

No Justice, No Peace.

The Abolition Geographies Collective

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<sup>2</sup> 40% of UWPD's use of force incidents involved Black individuals, while Black students count for less than 3% of the student body.

<https://uwpd.wisc.edu/crime-data/uwprd-use-of-force-data/use-of-force-data-2019-totals/>