

Dear Senator Carter,

I am writing to you in support of SB0276, to repeal Hopkins' private police.

I am a fourth-year graduate student at Johns Hopkins University. In June 2020, I signed a letter with over six-thousand other community members, addressed to President Ronald Daniels and the Board of Trustees, demanding the abandonment of the formation of an armed private police force. The President has not once replied to, addressed, or publicly acknowledged this letter once, and this incident is not even the first of its kind. In fact, this letter came twenty-one months after an initial petition of almost two-thousand community members that was similarly ignored. JHU appears committed to the creation of a private police even after the death of Tyrone West a few years ago, who was killed nearby by a Morgan State University officer.

To put the number six-thousand in perspective: JHU has a little over six-thousand undergraduate students currently enrolled. And a letter signed by roughly this many people was not mentioned even once in an email addressed to us or on their website.

The lack of any direct response to these multiple letters demonstrates a refusal to communicate with and a lack of respect for the entire city of Baltimore. University leaders have maintained in public announcements that the creation of a private police is necessary to improve campus safety. In doing so, and in ignoring these letters, they have made it clear this private police force is something simply to be advertised, and that they have no interest in communicating with the local community if it involves responding to criticism in any manner. This is foretelling of the complete lack of accountability the university absolutely will display should a private police force be created. If the university cannot directly respond to a peaceful letter signed by thousands of its own students, faculty, and community members, what reason do we have to believe they will hold themselves accountable to an inevitable killing by their armed police force?

It is helpful to remember that JHU is simply a private institution with no direct accountability to the city of Baltimore; the president only has a financial obligation towards the university's financial endowment. Knowing this, and knowing that they have ignored multiple community letters, the university has made it clear that their intentions behind the private police are financial. Many of us have been left to speculate that the private police force is nothing more than a marketable feature that the university can use discuss their dedication to safety, as opposed to the establishment of any communication with the community they claim to make more safe.

Last June, at the onset of the Black Lives Matter protests that swept the nation, the university announced the postponement of the private police force. The fact that this postponement came years after makes it very clear that this postponement is not proactive, but reactionary. In other words, it was simply done as a response to the changing political climate, because the university has given us no reason not to think the private police is simply a public relations tactic. In fact, some of my fellow grad students have recently seen

Hopkins police units despite the university announcing postponement via email, leading us to believe the university is reneging on this promise.

Is this public postponement of the private police force a waiting tactic to reintroduce the private police when racial tensions are gone? That is a question that worries the entire community, and we would rather not have it answered and instead see this story come to a close. Students and faculty have spent years demanding change to a president and board of trustees that cannot respond to criticism. There are no routes left to express our voices, and many of us see this bill as the last opportunity to oppose the creation of a private police.

Sincerely,

Sean Hare