

March 18, 2024

Office of the President  
220 South Jackson Street  
Athens, Georgia 30602-5000  
[president@uga.edu](mailto:president@uga.edu)

Dear President Morehead,

We, the undersigned, are writing to urge you to show your support for your students during this time of rampant hate and division. After the news of Laken Riley's tragic death, the community in Athens has been plagued by hateful rhetoric and fear mongering. Your students continue to seek your support as they face threats on social media that call for the "hunting" of immigrants and feel so unsafe on the University of Georgia's Athens campus that some Latino students are even afraid to walk to class alone. While we recognize that there may be differing perspectives and opinions regarding immigration and immigration reform, there is no debate around keeping students and young people safe. The community of Latino students, faculty, and staff at the University of Georgia need to know that you take their safety and well-being seriously, denounce harassment and hate speech directed towards Latinos, and will bring accountability to anyone seeking to intimidate or harm Latinos on any of the University's campuses.

We cannot emphasize enough how tragic Laken Riley's death is; that her life was cut so short is devastating and indicative of the widespread problem of violence against women. Unfortunately, the narrative has shifted away from the issue of women's safety and is instead being used as a cudgel against Latinos and immigrants in our communities. It is time that your administration acknowledges this reality, shines a light on the various threats that women of all backgrounds face, and condemns any and all harassment of Latinos.

In the University of Georgia's mission statement, it is mentioned that the University is "committed" to fostering a learning environment that is "dedicated to serving a diverse and well-prepared student body"; the increase in intolerance and hostility towards immigrants and Latinos violates this "core characteristic." We encourage you to firmly and publicly oppose hate speech and violence aimed at immigrants and Latinos with clarity and in the strongest manner possible.

The leaders of several Latino/Hispanic organizations on campus have spoken out against the tense and even hostile environment. However, it shouldn't be left to student-run organizations to address and improve the climate on the University's Athens campus. Students should be focused on studying, going to class, and preparing for future careers as they seek to make a difference in the world. Instead, right now, many Latino students on your campus in Athens fear for their safety. They need to know that they are not alone.

As University President, you have an obligation to support *all* of your students, including your Latino students. According to UGA's 2022 Fact Book, there are nearly 2,800 Hispanic students enrolled and we believe that it is your responsibility to ensure that this important segment of the University's community is heard, respected, and protected from harm.

In your 2024 State of the University Address, you quoted Abraham Lincoln to explain why the people of Georgia are right to “invest their ‘hopes, their support, and their confidence’ in the University of Georgia”. We now direct you to another quote of the former president: “I shall, when the time comes, try to do right, in view of all the lights then before me.” We strongly believe now is the time to “do right” by the Latinos on your campuses whose confidence and trust is waning as they face a profound level of harassment and hate. Indeed, *now* is the time to show your students the meaning of leadership, your ability to navigate these challenging times with integrity and compassion, and that you remain committed to the safety of everyone in the UGA community and the values that define the University of Georgia.

*With this in mind, we hope that you will respond to us within one week.*

Sincerely,

Organizations

Alejandro Coss  
President & CEO, Latin American Chamber of Commerce of Georgia

Amilcar Valencia  
Executive Director, El Refugio

Antonio Flores  
President & CEO, Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities (HACU)

Betina Kaplan  
Co-Director, U-Lead Athens

Candy Isabel  
Founder and CEO, Khamai Strategies

Daniela Rodriguez  
Executive Director, Migrant Equity Southeast

David Araya  
CEO & Co-Founder, Hispanic Organization Promoting Education, Inc. (HoPe)

Fatima Santillan  
Vice President, University of North Georgia Latino Student Association

Gilda (Gigi) Pedraza  
Executive Director, LCF Georgia

Jerry Gonzalez  
CEO, GALEO & GALEO Impact Fund

Jessica Nunan  
Co-CEO, Caminar Latino- Latinos United for Peace and Equity

Jose Marquez  
CEO, Techlatino- Latinos in Information Sciences and Technology Association

Joshua M Perea  
Society for the Advancement of Chicanos and Native Americans in Science

Julio Carrillo  
CEO, HOPE Atlanta

Laura Murvartian  
Founder & CEO, Arte GA

Luis Zaldivar  
State Director, CASA

Maritza Morelli  
Executive Director of Los Niños Primero

Nury Castillo Crawford  
Founder, The Little Book Spot

Omar Rodriguez  
President, Organization of Latin American Students (OLAS) at Kennesaw State University

Patty Pinckney  
Director, Latino Donor Collaborative

Rebeca Gibbons  
Co-Founder & CEO, Unidos Latino Association

Rigo Rivera  
Principal CEO, Consejos Rivera Consulting LLC.

Rosario Palacios  
Co-Founder, GA Familias Unidas

S. America Gruner  
Founder & President, COALICION DE LIDERES LATINOS INC. (CLILA)

Sheila Cruz-Morales  
Executive Director, College Access for Non-Citizens

Yadira Sanchez  
Executive Director, Poder Latinx

Yvette Moise  
President & Founder, Georgia Latino Film Alliance

## Individuals

Águeda Varela, Lawrenceville GA  
Ahvia Marable\*, Atlanta, GA  
Alani Rojas, Woodstock, GA  
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Ana Valencia, Marietta, GA  
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Anthony Rodriguez, Duluth, GA  
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JoBeth Allen, Athens, GA  
Jocelyn Crumpton\*, Athens, GA  
Joel Alvarado, Atlanta, GA  
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Kelly Medina, Athens, GA  
Kiaya Pierson, Atlanta, GA  
Kyle Gomez-Leineweber, Flowery Branch, GA  
Litzi Leon, Conyers, GA  
Lorena Mora, Duluth, GA  
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*\*Indicates UGA Alumni*