

August 3, 2020

To: Gallaudet University Members of the Board of Trustees

Subject: Follow up to your June 19-26, 2020 Response letters

Dear respected members of the Gallaudet University Board of Trustees,

While we are hopeful with the news that Dr. Glenn B. Anderson has returned to Chair the Gallaudet University Board of Trustees, we want to take the opportunity to continue our dialogue with Dr. Anderson and the Board of Trustees. Given that our collective grievances are shared by all of our organizations, as well as many community members, we have decided to write a joint letter from the unified group of concerned community organizations.

This response includes a followup from your response to the NBDA letter of June 16, 2020, as well as the various organizational letters sent between June 16-20, 2020. We thank you for acknowledging receipt of those letters. In these letters, we shared multiple concerns that are impacting the well-being of not only Black Deaf and hard-of-hearing members of the Gallaudet communities, as well as issues that have been prevalent for decades. These issues and concerns continue to prevent the next generation of promising youth from enrolling in, and prospering at, Gallaudet University.

In your responses, you affirmed that you would be working with the current University President. You stated that you supported their commitment to dismantling systemic racism. A month has passed since our first letter; we have yet to receive any updates on concrete actions by the University. This includes actually responding to and addressing all seven items that were listed in the NBDA letter of June 16th, 2020.

The community is hurting. This includes the community on Kendall Green, as well as the larger Gallaudet community of alumni. It includes the larger Deaf community that looks to Gallaudet for leadership. It is hurting not only from outside actions, but a lack of actions by the President's office. We would appreciate community accountability – a list of measurable objectives and milestones from and for the President's office, that show

specific progress towards dismantling systemic racism on campus. Our concern is exacerbated by the fact that there seems to be contentment with hosting conversations and developing task forces. In fact, the Bobbi Connects: A response to “Are We Done?” vlog that was done over 4 years ago is a perfect example of continued talk without meaningful action.

As of today, we continue to see deflections by the President and her staff. We have become increasingly alarmed and disturbed by students, staff, faculty, and alumni who have reached out to us sharing their experiences of coercion, intimidation, and even blackmail directly from President Cordano herself and/or her leadership team. This is appalling and a direct contradiction to the values of the institution and its Board of Trustees.

In addition, we would be remiss if we did not share that we have our own concerns about the Board of Trustees, as the fiduciary oversight body of Gallaudet and the President. [James F.X. Payne’s recent resignation letter](#) became public, and is filled with disturbing notes about the Board itself. “Our Board has a bias against action.” We are worried. It has become clear that the Board of Trustees is not in charge.

We are also worried that there is a continued lack of transparency from the Board of Trustees regarding their oversight of the President. We have been told that her contract has already been renewed.

The composition of the Board itself continues to disturb all of us. The departure of Duane Halliburton and Claudia Gordon have removed two critical Black Deaf representatives from the Board. They, as well as James F.X. Payne, have left because they could not deliver the assistance that they had committed to when they joined the Board; Mr. Payne in particular has pointed to the disconnect between the President’s office and the Board as a major cause. Despite Mr. Payne’s public cry to action, things continue to get worse, especially with another Board member of color, Dr. Natwar Gandhi resigning. This begs the question: what can one person do without a strong team of trustees willing to ensure Gallaudet takes the lead in dismantling racism within the campus? It remains to be seen if the addition of Dr. Glenn Anderson will aid in resolving the oppressive, xenophobic, and discriminating climate at Gallaudet University.

Moreover, the current composition of the Board does not meet the 1988 commitment to 51% Deaf members. These are all troublesome indicators of a Board struggling to perform its fiduciary duties. We want to call attention to Mr. Payne's quote, "He who controls information controls the truth." He has equally harsh words for the current University Counsel, "I suggest you get better counsel." These two quotes combined lead us - and the community at large - to believe that with the President controlling information that reaches the Board, you are being manipulated and misled.

As part of the Board's fiduciary duties (as outlined in the Education of the Deaf Act), you are supposed to oversee the President, their office, and Human Resources processes. All of these offices have failed miserably in their response to our organizational letters from June 16-20. As an example, instead of directly addressing concerns outlined in the letters, the University approved a "candid conversation" hosted by a C-level Gallaudet executive that included the President. The ensuing conversation was divisive, traumatic, and xenophobic. The failure of the Board of Trustees to address this is causing more harm.

Xenophobia is a direct violation of the U.S. Civil Rights Act of 1964, which condemn any form of discrimination based on national origin. In fiscal year 2020, Gallaudet University received \$137 million dollars in federal funds from Congress. We find it incredulous that the Board would approve of the President hosting an event - using University resources, paid for by American taxpayers - that promotes xenophobia.

The expectations of the Gallaudet University Board of Trustees are clearly laid out in the Education of the Deaf Act. We strongly encourage you to connect with the U.S. Department of Education, and review these expectations. A key component of these expectations is transparency - such as the current state of the President's contract, or the search for a replacement. The Deaf community deserves transparency regarding this matter.

Our community continues to bleed and suffer. The President continues to divide and deflect. Her words continue to cause harm upon community members. We have entrusted you - the Board - with the responsibility of overseeing the office of the President, who in turn is supposed to lead Gallaudet in educating Deaf people of all ages, as well as providing community leadership for the world.

Racism and xenophobia have no place at Gallaudet University and in our communities - either physically or virtually. At this time, Gallaudet cannot afford the glare of negative media attention. We cannot afford to continue risking the funds that are given to Gallaudet from Congress, nor can we risk losing accreditation from MSCHE.

Gallaudet should be a place that ensures equal opportunity for education and employment for all - and a place that serves as an example of equity for the world to see and follow.

It is clear that the university President is leading Gallaudet in a damaging way and that the Board of Trustees is not upholding its fiduciary responsibilities. We stand strong in our position that Roberta Cordano should be removed as Gallaudet University President. Please take rapid and decisive action to protect the University and the community's best interests by immediately beginning the search of an Inclusive Deaf President to lead the University toward healing and stability.

Sincerely,

Signed



www.NBDA.org

www.Councildemanos.org

www.Cal-ed.org

www.cad1906.org