



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Kristen Gonzalez

NY Electeds Fight for Free Speech: Letter to DHS, ICE, and Columbia University demanding the release of Mahmoud Khalil

KRISTEN GONZALEZ March 19, 2025

Secretary Kristi Noem, U.S Department of Homeland Security
2707 Martin Luther King Jr. Ave SE Washington D.C. 20528

CC ICE Acting Director: Todd Lyons & Columbia University Interim President: Katrina Armstrong

Dear Secretary Noem,

On behalf of our communities, we urge you to immediately release Mahmoud Khalil, a former Columbia graduate student and lawful permanent U.S. resident, and return him to his home and family in New York City.

On the night of Saturday, March 8, Mahmoud Khalil was arrested and taken from his Columbia University apartment by DHS agents to an undisclosed location. In a statement on X, the Department of Homeland Security announced that the administration would be detaining Khalil, a green card holder, in connection to his alleged participation in pro-Palestinian protests. Khalil has been denied his Constitutional right to due process, and is being held without legal justification or evidence that he has violated any laws.

Khalil's arrest is the latest act in a wider attack on free speech at institutions of higher learning, including the revocation of hundreds of millions of dollars in federal funding from Columbia University and the University of California system in response to ongoing pro-Palestinian demonstrations. Withholding funding from research institutions limits public knowledge and establishes a hostile precedent that goes against our country's longstanding history of vibrant student activism.

The treatment of Mahmoud Khalil by the Department of Homeland Security is not only inhumane, it is a blatant violation of his legal rights. He has been separated illegally from his pregnant wife, who is a United States citizen, and detained without due process thousands of miles from home. We see these actions by the Trump administration for what they are—a flagrantly unconstitutional attempt to suppress free speech and incite fear.

The administration's pattern of targeting the rights of students and immigrants to speak against injustice undermines democracy and makes everyone less safe. We're writing to urge his immediate release back to his family in New York City. We also call on the administration to remove ICE and DHS from our campuses. Finally, we urge Columbia University to cease any and all cooperation with immigration officials who violate our sanctuary city protections and put their students at risk.

Sincerely,

U.S. Representatives: Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and Nydia Velazquez

NYS Senators: Kristen Gonzalez, Jabari Brisport, Patricia Fahy, Andrew Gounardes, Gustavo Rivera, and Julia Salazar,

NYS Assemblymembers: Claire Valdez, Robert Carroll, Manny De Los Santos, Phara Forrest, Emily Gallagher, Jessica Gonzalez-Rojas, Zohran Mamdani, Marcela Mitaynes, Gabriella Romero, Sarahana Shrestha, Tony Simone, and Catalina Cruz

NYC Public Advocate Jumaane Williams, NYC Comptroller Brad Lander, Brooklyn Borough President Antonio Reynoso, NYC Council Speaker Adrienne Adams, NYC Deputy Speaker Diana Ayala

NYC Councilmembers: Justin Brannan, Tiffany Caban, Carmen De La Rosa, Jennifer Gutierrez, Shahana Hanif, Crystal Hudson, Rita Joseph, Shekar Krishnan, Christopher Marte, Chi Osse, Lincoln Restler, Carlina Rivera, Yusef Salaam, Pierina Sanchez, Sandy Nurse, and Julie Won