

April 1, 2025

Joint Statement on Congressional Attack on Academic Freedom

In the weeks since Donald Trump took office for his second term, we have seen the considerable erosion of democracy and the rule of law in the United States. The latest evidence is the unprecedented request for disclosure by the House Committee on Education and Workforce issued on March 27, 2025, seeking extensive information about Northwestern Pritzker School of Law's Bluhm Legal Clinic, including its policies, procedures, sources of funding, and budget. This request specifically targets Clinical Professor of Law Sheila Bedi, Director of the Community Justice and Civil Rights Clinic, and her constitutionally protected representation of clients.

This overreaching exercise of governmental power is an attempt to intimidate and interfere with academic freedom and Professor Bedi's First Amendment rights. Academic freedom ensures that universities can fulfill their fundamental mission of teaching and disseminating knowledge for the public good by protecting the intellectual choices of faculty members. For clinical faculty members, such choices include the freedom to select cases and clients, develop their clinic curriculum, and make pedagogical decisions about how they structure their clinic. The government's request is a blatant effort to interfere with academic freedom by seeking expansive information about the operation of and curricular choices by a law school clinical program, potentially including privileged work-product and constitutionally protected client selection. Northwestern and any other university receiving such a request should use appropriate legal processes to resist providing those records in order to preserve core academic freedom protections.

As experiential faculty members teaching and practicing law, we have duties beyond those as faculty members with academic freedom — we are representatives for our clients, officers of the court, and public citizens. Seeking to punish a lawyer for their ethical and zealous representation and advocacy compromises these core responsibilities. This, in turn, threatens the viability of our legal system — a system critical to the preservation of our democracy.

In the face of these challenges to the fundamental principles our country is founded on, we reaffirm our commitment to uphold the rule of law. We stand in solidarity with Professor Bedi, Northwestern University's Bluhm Legal Clinic, and law students across the United States advocating on behalf of their clients, and we condemn this attack on higher education, academic freedom, and freedom of expression. At this moment, the collective strength of law schools and clinics is not merely our best defense — it is our obligation to the profession, our students, and our democracy.

Board of Directors
Clinical Legal Education Association

Executive Committee of the
Clinical Section of the Association of
American Law Schools*

* The following is a statement of the Executive Committee of the Clinical Section of the Association of American Law Schools only. It does not necessarily represent the position of the Association.