

Resolution # 70-01

**The Graduate and Professional Student Association (GPSA)
The Pennsylvania State University**



of the 70th Assembly
May 18, 2020

Be it decided by the Assembly of Elected Delegates,

Condemnation of Discrimination and Harassment against the Black and Latinx Communities & Recommendations for Community Safety

Condemnation of COVID-19 Related Acts of Intolerance

(Decided: [Y / N / A])

1 **Nature of the Situation:**

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3 The Graduate and Professional Student Association recently passed legislation (Resolution #69-
4 20) strongly condemning discrimination and harassment against the Asian community. Intolerance
5 in the face of COVID-19 is boundless and instances of discrimination against other communities
6 and people of color have become more prevalent. The COVID-19 crisis has generated racism and
7 intolerance with an increase in discrimination against members of the African American and
8 Latinx communities (and those perceived to be of such descent).

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10 The Black and Latinx communities face unique challenges and hardship and are not exempt from
11 discrimination, harassment, and violence during the COVID-19 crisis. While prejudice and racism
12 often dictate how black and brown people are perceived and subsequently treated¹, the COVID-19
13 crisis has exacerbated the situation. With the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
14 recommending the use of facemasks in public, many Black and Latinx community members feel
15 unsafe doing so. Aaron Thomas, a black man living in Columbus, captures the fear of
16 discrimination succinctly: “Black men and women in this country have been killed for any and

¹ <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-47298111>

1 everything. A child with a toy gun, a young girl sleeping in her family home, a man buying an air-
2 gun at Walmart. Knowing all that, I just don't feel safe.”² The New York Times has reported
3 multiple instances of police harassment directly related to their use of face masks by black and
4 brown persons; in March two African-American men were asked by police to leave a Walmart in
5 Wood River, Illinois because they were wearing masks.³ Members of the Latinx communities
6 share similar fears, specifically fear of being racially profiled for being brown while wearing a
7 mask.⁴ Such harassment places these already vulnerable communities at greater risk by exposing
8 them to COVID-19 and subsequently preventing them from obtaining necessary supplies for
9 essential care during stay-home orders.

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11 While it is evident that the Black and Latinx communities face substantial harassment, it is not
12 evident that these instances are consistently reported and tracked. GPSA would like to take a
13 proactive approach and urge the university to create a way to report and track instances of
14 harassment and discrimination at Penn State, in the greater State College community where many
15 graduate and professional students reside, and anywhere graduate and professional students may
16 currently be domiciled due to the pandemic. This will allow Penn State to better serve communities
17 most at risk for discrimination.

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19 Beyond the issue of masks, these communities also face extreme hardship when accessing health
20 related help against COVID-19, including but not limited to direct access to healthcare facilities
21 and personnel and the ability to telework. Black and Latinx persons disproportionately work in
22 jobs which require their physical presence and do not offer a telework option; forcing them to go
23 out and increase risk of infection and transmission.⁵ Among the most vulnerable people are Latinx
24 undocumented workers. This community lacks necessary workplace protections, are severely
25 restricted from accessing safety net programs, and are ineligible for unemployment insurance,
26 although all pay taxes.

27
28 Undocumented workers report fear of being detained and deported as the primary reason for not
29 seeking medical care against COVID-19.⁶ These hardships are a direct result of structurally racist
30 policy that has disenfranchised black and brown people and cumulatively increases their
31 vulnerability for contracting the virus, losing their jobs, and suffering from hunger.⁷ The CDC
32 reports that “compared to whites, Hispanics are almost three times as likely to be uninsured, and
33 African Americans are almost twice as likely to be uninsured. Additionally, inadequate access is
34 driven by a long-standing distrust of the healthcare systems, language barriers and financial
35 implications associated with missing work to receive care.”⁸

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38 **Recommended Course of Action:**

² <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2020/apr/07/black-men-coronavirus-masks-safety>

³ <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/14/us/coronavirus-masks-racism-african-americans.html>

⁴ <https://www.cnn.com/2020/04/07/us/face-masks-ethnicity-coronavirus-cdc-trnd/index.html>

⁵ <https://www.bread.org/blog/race-hunger-and-covid-19-impact-latinoa-communities>

⁶ <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/28/us/coronavirus-california-black-latinos.html>

⁷ <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/need-extra-precautions/racial-ethnic-minorities.html>

⁸ <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/need-extra-precautions/racial-ethnic-minorities.html>

1 By adopting this resolution, the Graduate and Professional Student Association formally supports
2 our Black and Latinx community members and unequivocally condemns all discrimination and
3 violence towards this community.

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5 The Graduate and Professional Student Association also recommends the following actions to the
6 Penn State administration:

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8 • **As in Resolution 69-20, made by the 69th Assembly of GPSA to support the Asian**
9 **Community in State College, we recommend that the Penn State administration**
10 **formally condemn racist and bigoted actions made against members of the Penn**
11 **State and State College communities through a statement sent to all members of**
12 **the community (faculty/staff/students).** We also ask that the university investigate these
13 acts made against or by members of the Penn State community. We ask that this statement
14 be released as soon as possible.
- 15 • **The administration publish reported acts of intolerance linked to COVID-19, updated**
16 **regularly with results from the aforementioned secure submission tool.** This tracker
17 should include information such as the date of the act, the location, a description of the act,
18 whether perpetrators are known, and what response is planned. It is imperative that all acts
19 of intolerance linked to COVID-19 are tracked --not only acts against those of African
20 American or Latinx descent (or those perceived to be of such ancestry) but also against
21 those who may be targets of intolerance due to disability, immigration status, and other
22 protected characteristics. This tracker is vital to provide up-to-date and accurate
23 information to the State College community. By providing complete information, this
24 tracker would serve to promote understanding of how pervasive these acts are, legitimize
25 the concern among Black and Latinx persons in the State College area of being victims or
26 witnesses to acts of intolerance, and empower the community to collectively respond in
27 solidarity and with compassion.
- 28 • **In instances where these acts are perpetrated by an identified Penn State student,**
29 **faculty, staff or affiliate we recommend immediate action be taken by the governing**
30 **office of conduct.** This will ensure the parties involved are made aware of any and all
31 violations and make certain that proper action against perpetrators is taken, whether that
32 be in the form of disciplinary, and/or an educational manner.
- 33 • **Work with organizations** within Penn State like the Paul Robeson Cultural Center
34 (PRCC) and Counseling & Psychological Services (CAPS) to ensure Black and Latinx
35 graduate and professional students are supported in terms of mental health, wellness, and
36 community.
- 37 • **Connect University Health Services (UHS) to potentially underserved graduate and**
38 **professional students without SHIP** and ensure these students have access to low-cost or
39 free medical services during the COVID-19 crisis. Additionally, ensure that graduate and
40 professional students who are no longer located in State College have access to medications
41 they need, whether through UHS's mail prescription program or other means.
- 42 • **Promote precautions to protect individuals** in the Penn State and the greater State
43 College community to prevent the spread of COVID-19. This includes educating people
44 on how to correctly use and care for a cloth face mask and helping them procure one if
45 needed. This work could be carried out through the universities Health Promotion &
46 Wellness, University Health Services, or other similar Penn State entities.

Respectfully submitted,

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Affirm

Veto

The Graduate and Professional Student Association