October 30, 2026

AAUP-CH Statement on UNC's Agreement with the Department of Justice

In mid-October 2026 UNC announced a deal with the Department of Justice (DoJ) via a press release to expire on December 31, 2028. In the press release Chancellor Lee Roberts claimed, "We're proud to resolve [a range of] issues at Carolina in a way that protects our mission and affirms the civil rights of everyone in the community."

UNC has stated its motive for signing the agreement as two-fold. First, the agreement would lead the DoJ to drop the pursuit of 18 Title VI discrimination complaints against UNC that the press release claimed would avoid "the costs, uncertainty and distractions of prolonged legal proceedings." Second, according to UNC, the agreement "ensures Carolina's eligibility to compete for federal grants, contracts and awards." These reasons suggest that Chancellor Roberts signed the agreement due to the threat of sanctions by the federal government.

The agreement reads like a document of ruthless pragmatism and a policy of appeasement by UNC to the Trump administration. Neither side has disclosed the nature of these Title VI complaints that created further incentive for our chancellor to make this agreement. Regardless of UNC's motives or the nature of these Title VI complaints, the Chapel Hill chapter of the AAUP does not see this agreement as a proud moment for our University, nor do we think the agreement affirms the civil rights of all of our students. Second, the agreement places a disproportionate emphasis on investigating incidents of antisemitism compared to discrimination against other groups based on race, religion, gender, or national origin.

On racism and other forms of discrimination: the agreement only considers "color-blind" and "race-blind" policies. This language applies a double-standard where UNC will not vigorously pursue complaints against discrimination other than ones that invoke antisemitism. We see this definition as denying rather than affirming the civil rights of all students. We fear the agreement will continue and even exacerbate a toxic campus culture that includes the closing of the Upendo Lounge as a safe space for students as well as the minimalization of several documented racist incidents that have already occurred on our campus during the Fall 2026 semester.

On antisemitism: the ten-page agreement uses the term no less than fourteen times and "Jewish and Israeli" students six times, stipulating new requirements for vigorous enforcement. But, even though the agreement defines other terms, it does not define antisemitism. Our AAUP chapter sees this as deeply concerning because of recent attempts to equate any criticism of the Israeli government and violence in the Middle East as antisemitic. We reject this false definition. It distracts and prevents our collective denunciation of actual antisemitism. Furthermore, this false definition of antisemitism restricts free speech and academic freedom on campus.

We stand with student groups and alumni who have also expressed grave concerns over how this agreement will be implemented over the next two years. We aim to be vigilant in resisting any attempt at enforcement by UNC and the DoJ that violates the 1964 Civil Rights Act, creates an unsafe environment, or restricts academic freedom. In short, we intend to enforce clause 7 in the agreement that states: "Both Parties affirm their commitments to academic freedom and civil rights," for all students, staff, and faculty on our campus.