



August 11, 2016

Dear President Kaler and University Regents,

We are writing to express our concern regarding the potential closing of the Program in Human Rights and Health (PHRH) within the School of Public Health in the Academic Health Center.

As you may know, this program has been in existence for decades and has brought significant positive recognition to the University over that time. PHRH and associated faculty have provided important voices and research locally and internationally on a variety of policy topics ranging from perinatal care delivery and payment models, to public health data integrity, to the protection of vulnerable populations.

Among those involved in the program are Dr. Bryan Dowd and Dr. Steven Calvin, co-chairs, and Dr. Kirk Allison, Program Director.

On March 31, 2016, Dr. Steven Calvin sent a letter to the House Human Services Finance Committee expressing his concerns regarding fetal tissue research at the University. (For more, see attached timeline of events.) On June 8th, Dean Finnegan sent a letter to Dr. Allison announcing that PHRH will be closed as of August 15th. A prior reason given for possible closure was financial in nature, but enrollment in program courses has increased significantly the last few years, with a more than doubling of the number of students involved in the program from FY14 to FY16, and a commensurate increase in tuition revenue. It is our understanding that despite requests, Dean Finnegan has to date failed to schedule any further meetings on this issue.

The closing of the PHRH under these circumstances sends a disturbing signal to all in the university community who wish to exercise their rights of free speech. This is a matter of very significant concern to us. Given the controversy surrounding the University's handling of bioethics in the last year, it seems counterproductive for the University to step away from a program that seeks to promote ethical decision making in the realm of health and human rights.

An appeal has been made to the Provost for a moratorium on the closure. Because August 15th is just days away, we are asking that you, as leaders of the University, urge Dean Finnegan to postpone the closure of the program until the Dean is able to meet with affected stakeholders of the program and there is a release of detailed financial information justifying its closure.



In addition to this letter, we attached a packet of support letters previously sent to Dean Finnegan. We apologize as this packet contains a letter by Reps. Kathy Lohmer, Tim Miller, Abigail Whelan and Peggy Scott that was intended to reach the regents (we had CC'd), yet failed to do so. It is attached for your review now. Please let us know if you have questions.

We are hoping that moving forward, the University will do everything it can to help save and support this program. We look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,



Representative Matt Dean
Chair, Health and Human Services Committee



Representative Bud Nornes
Chair, Higher Education Committee



Representative Peggy Scott
Chair, Civil Law and Data Practices Committee



Representative Kathy Lohmer
Assistant Majority Leader



Representative Cindy Pugh



Representative Tim Miller



Representative Abigail Whelan