

January 26, 2026

Via email and physical mail

Domenico Grasso, President, University of Michigan
3190 Ruthven Building
1109 Geddes Ave.
Ann Arbor, MI 48109
grasso@umich.edu

Dear President Grasso,

The AAUP (American Association of University Professors) writes to you with deep concern regarding expanding surveillance practices at the University of Michigan. We are concerned first by UM's installation of approximately 1,200 new and powerful surveillance cameras across campus, most concerningly in public spaces like the Diag and the Law Quad¹, as part of the [Security Technology Enhancement Project \(STEP\)](#). Secondly, we are concerned by the university's adoption of [a new standard practice guide \(SPG\), numbered 510.02](#), which strips away many of the protections that had earlier guided the use of surveillance cameras on campus under SPG 606.01.

Both the content and the process of UM's actions undermine two core principles of the AAUP, namely academic freedom and shared governance. First, the University of Michigan's push for surveillance cameras on campus is antithetical to the [AAUP's long-established standards regarding academic freedom and electronic communications](#). Of particular relevance:

Academic freedom is dependent on a researcher's ability not only to gain access to information but also to explore ideas and knowledge without fear of surveillance or interference. (43)

AAUP shared governance standards provide that formulation and implementation policies governing technologies should be developed by faculty members through representative institutions of shared governance (53). We note that both the widespread deployment of surveillance cameras and the implementation of SPG 510.02 occurred despite the adoption of a [faculty government resolution calling on the university to put in place rules to delimit and contain the rapidly growing technologies of surveillance](#) and in

¹ See MLaw-ACLU Open Letter to the University of Michigan Board of Regents, June 11, 2025. <https://drive.google.com/file/d/11QclbGTq9XcQcvu8i-LdNzLAhr3OwQmL/view>.

contradiction to the procedures laid out in SPG 606.01, in violation of another core AAUP standard that

any new policy or major revision of an existing policy should be subject to approval by a broader faculty body such as a faculty senate. (55)

The university's former SPG 606.01 mandated the formation of an oversight committee of faculty, students, and administrators who were charged with (a) reviewing and revising the SPG and related practices and procedures, (b) reviewing and approving amendments to the policy, and (c) providing periodic updates to the UM community about camera systems in the spirit of transparency. For years, the administration defied that policy and did not appoint an oversight committee. And contrary to the former SPG provision, the administration did away with that provision altogether without any input. Although the oversight committee existed under the old policy to ensure accountability and transparency, there is nothing in the new policy that serves this function. We appreciate that your office last summer expressed interest in convening the STEP committee to consult on the use of these cameras, but that committee is not a formal oversight committee. It is clear that the newly formed advisory committee has no ability to review, revise, or approve changes to camera policy as was previously required by SPG 606.01.

In addition to these procedural concerns, the new SPG 510.02 reduces the protections that the campus community can expect with regards to surveillance. For example, the former policy said,

The university has a significant responsibility to take appropriate steps to protect personal privacy and civil liberties when it operates security cameras systems. [. . .] [S]uch installations must not impinge on or unduly constrain the academic freedom or civil liberties of community members or their freedom of assembly and expression.

The new policy replaces that language with a less stringent standard, requiring only that DPSS not place cameras "with the intent to chill, compel, prevent, or punish speech or association." Thus, under the new standard, as long as the Division of Public Safety and Security (DPSS) does not *intend* to chill speech, there is no violation of policy even if the placement of the camera—for example, in the Diag—actually does chill speech and diminish academic freedom.

The new policy also opens the possibility of audio recording on campus: As SPG 606.01 said, "Security camera systems should not enable audio recording," with certain limited exceptions requiring a written rationale after consultation among UM's executive vice president, the chief financial officer, DPSS, and the general counsel. This provision was eliminated under the new policy, where all decisions on matters are simply delegated to DPSS. Furthermore, the old policy said that the recordings and recorded images must be erased within thirty days unless needed for court proceedings and other limited reasons. There is no such protection in the new policy.

We call on the University of Michigan to take actions that demonstrate its commitment to AAUP-supported principles of academic freedom and shared governance. Specifically, we ask the university to:

January 26, 2026

Page 3 of 3

1. Reinstate SPG 606.01, which was abolished in violation of university policy and the principle of shared governance.
2. Form an oversight committee to ensure any use of surveillance is consistent with university values and regulations, as required by SPG 606.01.
3. Fund a study on whether surveillance cameras have been effective in deterring and solving violent crimes at universities and in public spaces so the oversight committee can take these findings into account when approving policies around surveillance cameras.
4. Remove the surveillance cameras on the Diag, the center of free speech on campus, because surveillance chills academic freedom, freedom of speech, and freedom of expression.
5. Remove the surveillance camera on the Law Quad because these cameras can surveille students in their residences, in violation of their privacy rights.
6. Place a moratorium on the installation of more surveillance cameras on campus until an oversight committee is convened and has engaged in informed and evidence-based deliberations.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Todd Wolfson". The signature is stylized and cursive.

Todd Wolfson, AAUP President

Mia McIver, AAUP Executive Director

Britt Paris, Chair, AAUP ad hoc Committee on AI in Academic Professions

Julie Boland, President, University of Michigan Ann Arbor Chapter of the AAUP

Derek R. Peterson, Chair, University of Michigan Faculty Senate

Domenico Grasso
President

3190 Ruthven Building
1109 Geddes Avenue
Ann Arbor, Michigan 48109-1079
TEL: 734 764-6270

February 2, 2026

Mr. Todd Wolfson
AAUP President
555 New Jersey Ave. NW
Suite 600
Washington, DC 20001

Dear Mr. Wolfson,

Thank you for your letter regarding the University of Michigan's Security Technology Enhancement Project.

Please allow me to explain the rationale and thinking that informs our decisions surrounding safety and security on our campus. The safety and well-being of all our students, faculty and staff is a top priority of mine, has been for past presidents, and will be for future presidents. All community members, patients, and other visitors should feel safe on our campus. A sense of safety goes beyond physical safety and includes attending events and engaging in free speech, both hallmarks of the University of Michigan.

Unfortunately, our world continues to change, often in ways that jeopardize our sense of safety and security.

In December, a gunman killed two students at Brown University. Charlie Kirk was assassinated on the campus of Utah Valley University this past fall, and in 2023 a shooting occurred at nearby Michigan State University, where three students lost their lives and five others were seriously wounded.

The Michigan State shooting prompted U-M to evaluate its safety and security measures with the help of an externally led study of our plans, tactics and procedures. The recommendation to install additional cameras on campus was among the study's findings.

In addition to gun violence on campuses across the nation, incidents of assault, vandalism and intimidation of individuals expressing themselves through free speech or peaceful protests have also risen. Each year, we hear from faculty and students who have received credible threats—often in response to their scholarship and publications—from organizations and individuals who want to silence, intimidate, harass, or harm them. Security cameras are a part of the system we use to help keep these critical and compelling voices on our campus safe.

Our Division of Public Safety and Security (DPSS), the unit responsible for campus safety and protection, developed a plan to enhance campus security. The plan not only included deterrence

tactics but also initiatives that would allow DPSS to respond to incidents faster, establish protocols to minimize additional harm, memorialize factual events, as illustrated by the recent events in Minneapolis, help solve crimes, and locate or identify people in danger or engaged in illegal activity.

As president, I am ultimately responsible for the safety of our campus. The executive director of public safety reports directly to me. When SPG 606.01 was created in 2013, it may have been the right tool for the time. After 12 years and a dramatic shift in the safety profile of college campuses in general and on the University of Michigan's campuses in particular, the policy needed to be reviewed and updated in light of many of the concerns outlined above. We already have a Police Department Oversight Committee that has been functioning effectively for years and that can and will carefully review the conduct of our Department of Public Safety and Security, including its stewardship of security cameras, among other physical security technologies.

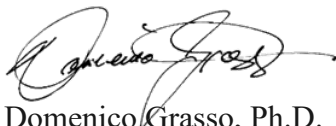
Moreover, at the urging of our Senate Advisory Committee on University Affairs (SACUA) – the executive branch of our faculty senate – we introduced an advisory committee to the new SPG to provide input and suggestions to our STEP. SACUA identified members to serve on this committee. The advisory committee has met and is engaged in good dialogue. I am confident that any concerns and suggestions raised by SACUA will be evaluated and incorporated into our security plans, provided they make our campus community safer without leaving those responsible for public safety ill-prepared to fulfill their responsibilities.

Your letter asserts that security cameras are only used to curtail free speech and solve violent crimes. This is unfair and untrue. Our focus has always been on safety. There are numerous studies documenting how security cameras deter crime, help public safety officials identify individuals involved in crimes or in danger, and help prevent additional harm to a community during unthinkable events. The University of Michigan is also mindful of the laws that limit the use of security cameras. If we become aware of any misuse of this technology the university will take the necessary steps to correct improper actions.

Free speech, peaceful protests, and activism are part of the University of Michigan's DNA. Our STEP in no way curtails or chills the rights of students, faculty, or staff to engage in these activities.

While no safety and security plan is perfect or foolproof, we believe our plan makes the University of Michigan better prepared to provide a welcoming and safe campus for all.

Sincerely,



Domenico Grasso, Ph.D.
President

CC:

Mia McIver, AAUP Executive Director

Britt Paris, Chair, AAUP ad hoc Committee on AI in Academic Professions

Julie Boland, President, University of Michigan Ann Arbor Chapter of the AAUP

Derek R. Peterson, Chair, University of Michigan Faculty Senate