



**Graduate Student Organization,  
Stony Brook University  
May 2, 2024**

**Resolution 2024-01**

**Sponsor(s): Alternate Senator William Meaney, Alternate Senator Narmin Mekawy**

**Resolution in Support of Arrested Student Protesters and in Affirmation of the Right to  
Free Speech on Campus**

**WHEREAS**, On March 26, 2024, Stony Brook University Police Department (UPD) arrested nine Pro-Palestinian protesters, including seven students (two of whom are graduate students), one alumnus, and one community member for holding a non-violent sit-in in the atrium of the Administration Building. The students were supporting Palestine and the divestment from Israel because of the ongoing inhumane practices during the Israel-Palestine conflict;

**WHEREAS**, Additionally during protests on May 1-2, twenty-two undergraduate students, three graduate students, two faculty members, and two alumni were arrested during a peaceful protest. Those arrested by UPD were released at much later time than those taken to Riverhead by the Suffolk County Police Department (SCPD)/State Troopers. Additionally, all police units illegally confiscated cell phones and refuse to return the phones, stating that the cell phones are criminal evidence, though they were only given violations and *not charged with any crime*. Those arrested also received academic suspensions including faculty suspension, and the students are not allowed to return to their dorms. They are now *homeless/unhoused* for the rest of the semester. Even before the protest, administration constantly removed flyers regarding the Palestinian and divestment cause - including the protests planned on campus - but left all the other flyers about other events. These are targeted moves to suppress pro-Palestinian speech (which violates University policy supporting freedom of speech), a trend consistent with the backlash undergraduate group, SB4Palestine, have received. The administration focused on the logistics of the protest rather than the true purpose of it. University President McInnis's statement emailed on May 2 is also incorrect. The reality is that there is substantial number of videos and images documenting proof of police force and bizarre increased police response. The reality is that only police intimidated others: two additional police units - both Suffolk County police and State Troopers - in addition to UPD, totaled to over 150 officers intimidated students who were not violent and not intimidating others. In reality, SBU's Police Department did show major force and were not professional - including one female student tackled by 4 police officers when walking away; others were thrown to the ground and officers charged at students and dispersed students in a completely public space. In reality, the Staller Steps was not reserved at midnight, so no infringement on reservations at that time could have occurred, again this is a public space so students should not have been evacuated from the buildings, including the

library. The university exhibited hypocrisy in arresting students and taking them to the police station in a “go seawolves” bus.

**WHEREAS**, Irrespective of individual beliefs regarding the Israel-Palestine conflict, a sit-in is not hate speech nor disruptive and thus is protected free speech, especially since SBU is a *public university*, and is legally an “open campus;”

**WHEREAS**, Despite UPD’s claims that protesters on March 26, 2024 “proceeded to disrupt university activities inside the building through the use of a bullhorn, a drum, and loud chants,” video footage, photographs, and eye-witness accounts from the event depict students quietly sitting.

**WHEREAS**, Even if protestors did use a bullhorn, drum, and loud chants, the protestors remained non-violent and their behavior did not merit arrest and threatens the notion of free speech. Furthermore, student sit-in protests have a long history dating back to the Civil Rights Movement. A key leader of the Civil Rights Movement - the late Congressman and former chair of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee John Lewis - called for “good trouble, necessary trouble.” Historically, students during the Civil Rights Movement were arrested for non-violent sit-ins and said students were arrested. More than sixty years later, we applaud those brave students who advocated for equal rights and condemn their unjust arrests. It is necessary to allow students to become activists and peacefully rally for their causes.

This is not the first time under the McInnis administration that free speech was threatened when a member of the Stony Brook community rallied for their cause. Indeed, when a faculty member condemned the murder of a mentally ill man by Suffolk County police in January 2023, Enterprise Risk Management and the administration endorsed the Police Benevolent Association’s condemnation of the faculty member’s questioning why the police did not de-escalate a situation during a wellness check.

In these instances, police agencies and/or their benevolent associations played a pivotal role in suppressing free speech. While their intent to maintain order is understood, it is essential to foster an environment where free speech is not only allowed but encouraged, especially in academic settings. Scholar Howard Zinn believed that police historically have suppressed free speech saying, “The state and its police were not neutral referees in a society of contending interests. They were on the side of the rich and powerful. Free speech? Try it and the police will be there with their horses, their clubs, their guns, to stop you.” The inclusion of this fact in this letter is not to condemn police in their entirety; rather, it is to connect the suppression of free speech by police to maintain power for the privileged and encourage reflection and improvement in how peaceful protests are managed and facilitated by those in authority.

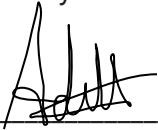
**BE IT THEREFORE RESOLVED THAT:** The Graduate Student Organization affirms its commitment to free speech, and condemns the university's disproportionate response to alleged actions that evidence shows did not occur;

**FURTHER RESOLVED**, that the GSO demands that Stony Brook University:

1. Drop all charges against the arrested protestors (students, alumnus and community member)
2. Pay to expunge the records of said arrested
3. All suspensions are to be rescinded
4. Review the decision-making process for these arrests in a public, transparent manner
5. Revise current policies that require highly-regulated agreements for student protests that curtail free speech
6. Ban interference by police during non-violent and non-destructive protests

Approved: **YES/NO**

Date: 2 May 2024



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Adithya Muralli, President