

August 7, 2020

Dear Chancellor Pagano and Executive Vice Chancellor Purdy,

Thank you for your response to the “Decriminalize UWT” petition we submitted to you in June. We appreciate your recognition of the importance of this work for our students and campus. We cannot stress enough the urgency of our demand that UWT divest from the Tacoma Police Department (TPD) immediately, especially in light of the recent killings of Manuel Ellis and Bennie Branch at the hands of the Tacoma Police. Your response identifies clear commitments in regards to some, but not all, of the demands. We look forward to additional clarity as we collaboratively work to divest from TPD and to ensure that UW Tacoma’s approach to campus safety supports student learning and addresses the very real harms that our campus communities face in the name of security, especially Black and Indigenous people, and other People of Color (BIPOC).

Below we address your responses to each of the demands included in the petition. We offer this in an effort to further clarify your commitments, develop mechanisms of accountability, and begin the process of implementation of concrete change at UW Tacoma.

In addition to the below, and in alignment with the Staff Association, we ask that an independent board consisting of students, staff, faculty, and Tacoma community members be convened and empowered to make recommendations regarding the decriminalization of UW Tacoma and determinations of if, when, and how TPD will be engaged by UW Tacoma, and to hold the institution accountable to its commitments.

Demand #1. Stop using TPD to respond to referrals for welfare checks under the Safe Campus program. To be clear, we want an explicit commitment from your office to divest from TPD. In your response, you write of the current state of affairs: “For students who reside off-campus, it is beyond the jurisdiction of CS&S officers to conduct welfare checks. In those instances, we have engaged local law enforcement agencies to assist with reaching our students to ensure their safety and well-being.” However, in the previous paragraph you acknowledge that BIPOC students “may have traumatic lived experiences with police brutality, racial profiling, and other forms of violence associated with law enforcement.” We urge you to recognize that, by handing over a student’s home address to law enforcement, the University could very possibly be *compromising* rather than ensuring a student’s safety and well-being. TPD’s presence may be experienced as a threat, and hence may escalate, rather than deescalate, a crisis situation.

Additionally, we note that while you use the term “jurisdiction” in its technical and legal sense earlier in your letter when you note that “Our campus is in the City of Tacoma law enforcement jurisdiction,” here you are invoking jurisdiction more informally. We are concerned by this slippage in usage, and we note that, in the technical sense of the word, welfare checks are *not* beyond the jurisdiction of campus staff as we have a duty to serve all of our students. We contend that, if the only alternative is that armed law enforcement conduct welfare checks, campus staff *must* be the ones to do this work, including for off-campus students. Since, as you point out, the overwhelming majority of students live off campus, it is critical that the work of creating alternatives to armed first-responders be prioritized in every sense of the word. This should include, but not be limited to,

leveraging existing professional expertise and practicum training opportunities within our institution's School of Social Work and Criminal Justice. You indicate that the Tri-Campus Safe Campus Program will begin this work over the summer. Is this work already underway? How can UWT students, faculty, and non-CS&S staff participate in and inform this work? Will at least one of the listening and strategy sessions be dedicated to reimagining welfare checks?

Demands #2 and #3. Stop using TPD for additional security for any campus events. Do not replace TPD presence with any other armed law enforcement agency. In your response, you write that you "do not and will not contract with TPD" for "security services for campus events, including public lectures, meetings, and ceremonies." *We applaud this commitment and request that it be explicitly announced to the campus community as well as codified in policy.* It bears noting that we do not view divestment in merely contractual terms. We seek a commitment from your office to no longer use TPD for these services, whether they are formally contracted for or not.

You also write: "We routinely keep TPD apprised of organized activities on campus; if TPD determines police presence is warranted, we do not legally have the jurisdiction to block them from carrying out police activity on campus. When activities occur on and around campus that directly impact the safety of members of our campus community, or high-profile guests and dignitaries, our noncommissioned officers are legally dependent on TPD to partner with our security team for their safety and the safety of the broader community." Who currently determines whether or not a campus activity should be reported to TPD? What is the current protocol that guides such communication? Is this a formal agreement UWT has with the TPD? Who determines whether there is a threat that warrants contacting the TPD, and what are the criteria? We appreciate that you have committed yourselves to facilitating the development of "a set of recommendations to TPD and the City of Tacoma on how to minimize the presence of armed first-responders as event security, including by not substituting for TPD any other armed law enforcement agency as event security." The goal of protecting campus community members, particularly Black, Indigenous, and other persons of color, from state sanctioned violence by law enforcement agencies should guide such a process.

Demand #4. Publicly commit to not hiring former police officers with disciplinary records to UWT Security. In your response you note that UW Tacoma's Campus Safety and Security personnel are not armed. *If this is not already codified in policy, we insist that this be done.* You also note that CS&S personnel are not commissioned police officers. What percentage are former or retired police officers? Is there a policy to encourage the hiring of CS&S officers from non-law enforcement backgrounds? Are de-escalation techniques and training listed among the desired qualifications for these positions? You write: "We publicly commit to not hiring any officers for CS&S who have previously been disciplined for any ethics, use of force, violence, bias, and any other serious violations, to the extent that records of such disciplinary action are available through background checks." *Please specify which agencies and bodies will be contacted as part of the background check.* You also refer to CS&S as a "small security force." This is precisely why a re-imagining of campus safety is urgently needed. The emphasis on "force" and the prioritization of security is troubling. Safety should be paramount and an emphasis on de-escalation instead of force would help us to ensure that no one is harmed unnecessarily.

Demand #5. Publicly commit to never inviting CBP or ICE to campus for any reason. In your response, you write: “The Chancellor’s Office will encourage faculty and staff throughout UW Tacoma to refrain from hosting ICE or CBP on campus, and in particular in our classrooms.” We implore your office to take a more decisive position and create a clear policy on this issue. Such invitations need to be understood as creating a hostile climate on campus.

Additionally, we were glad to read that your office recognizes the potential for restorative practices to be more widely engaged on the campus. With robust institutional support, restorative practices could be utilized to respond to a range of harms in ways that promote accountability, repair, and campus cultural change. It is important that such efforts are developed in partnership with members of our campus and broader communities who have extensive backgrounds in this work.

Finally, your email to the campus community on July 30 indicated that the petition was only endorsed by the Faculty Executive Council rather than by a majority vote of the full Faculty Assembly. We ask that you include a correction in your next correspondence to the campus community about the work to decriminalize the campus. Please also be advised that a broad signature-collecting campaign is underway to encourage follow-through and further action, with more than one hundred signatories to date.

Sincerely,

Marian S. Harris, 2019–2020 Chair, Faculty Assembly

Sarah Hampson, 2020–2021 Chair, Faculty Assembly

Turan Kayaoglu, 2020–2021 Vice Chair, Faculty Assembly

In partnership with the Decriminalize UWT Working Group