



Academic Freedom Alliance Letter to Georgetown University Law Center

The AFA calls on GULC to end its investigation of Ilya Shapiro

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The Academic Freedom Alliance has released a public letter to the Georgetown University Law Center objecting to its treatment of a senior lecturer. Ilya Shapiro was director of the Robert A. Levy Center for Constitutional Studies at the Cato Institute. It was recently announced that Shapiro had been appointed to be the executive director of the Georgetown Center for the Constitution and a senior lecturer at the Georgetown University Law Center. He was to begin his duties on February 1, 2022.

On January 26, Shapiro posted a series of tweets on the vacancy created by the retirement of Justice Stephen Breyer and President Joe Biden's declaration that he would be selecting a black woman to fill the spot. Shapiro contended that Biden's announced limitation on the candidate pool would exclude the person Shapiro thought was "objectively best" for the position and as a consequence the president would be choosing a "lesser black woman" in his stead. Shapiro subsequently deleted the posts and apologized, but a controversy erupted that included demands that he be fired by GULC. The dean of the law school announced that Shapiro would be suspended until an investigation was concluded on whether the tweets had violated any university policies.

The Academic Freedom Alliance wrote to Dean Treanor explaining that the law school was itself violating the university's policies on free expression by investigating a member of the faculty for his Twitter posts and was threatening to erode free speech protections for all of its faculty. Unfortunately, Georgetown University Law Center does not have a good record of late in standing up for free speech and academic freedom.

From the letter:

Private speech on controversial social and political topics can sometimes be heated, ill-tempered, ill-considered, and broadly offensive. We do not hold such extramural speech to the standards that we would properly expect from speech in the classroom or from scholarly research. Going down the road of punishing faculty for their political speech on social media that some members of the university community find insensitive or hurtful will leave all members of the faculty

vulnerable to denunciations, investigations, and threats of termination. It would erode the protections for free expression that the university purports to provide to all members of the campus community, including the members of the faculty.