

Protect IU from 202 – opening statement

Thank you, everyone, for coming to this press conference. My name is Heather Akou and I'm a faculty member at IU-Bloomington. I'm also a member of the University Alliance for Racial Justice, a statewide advocacy group that formed 2.5 years ago to push back on proposed legislation that would have banned teaching about race and racism in K-12 schools in the state of Indiana.

The UARJ is holding this press conference to launch a campaign that we are calling, "Protect IU from 202," referring to state law SEA 202, which went into effect on July 1st. To be honest, because IU's new expressive activity policy (UA-10) is intertwined with other policies on events (UA-19) and the First Amendment (UA-14) in a confusing labyrinth of policies—and because SEA 202 is just beginning to be implemented at the university level—we are not entirely sure that this press conference is allowed since we did not ask for permission in advance. We are counting on our First Amendment rights under state and federal law.

In chapter 2 of his short book, *On Tyranny*, historian Timothy Snyder urges people who are trying to resist authoritarianism to Defend Institutions.

It is our institutions that help us to preserve decency. They need our help as well. Do not speak of 'our institutions' unless you make them yours by acting on their behalf. Institutions do not protect themselves. They fall one after the other unless each is defended from the beginning. So choose an institution you care about—a court, a newspaper, a law, a labor union—and take its side.

We are here because we care about IU. We want to protect IU. We want this campus to be a place where academic freedom is a real thing... a place where racial diversity (and other kinds of diversity) is both welcome and honored.

We are aware that "Protect IU" is the umbrella term for the IU Police Department and other health and safety offices at IU. We are reclaiming this term.

Contrary to rhetoric we are hearing from politicians, administrators, and some members of the public, we—as faculty, staff, and students—are not trying to destroy our own university. Our goal is to protect what is already good and make it even better. Protect IU.

And with that, I will turn the microphone over to our first speaker.