News



Georgetown University Law Center's dean says the top federal prosecutor for Washington, D.C., attacked the university's Catholic mission when he threatened to blackball its graduates from internships if the school doesn't eliminate diversity, equity and inclusion programs and curriculum. (Courtesy of Georgetown Law Center)



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Receiving a threatening letter in March from the U.S. Attorney's Office in Washington, D.C., presented William Treanor, then the dean of Georgetown University's law school, with a dilemma.

Acquiesce to the letter's demands that Georgetown Law eliminate its diversity, equity and inclusion programs or stand up for the law school and its understanding of the university's Jesuit mission. Treanor chose the latter option.

"With this administration, you don't do something like this lightly. You have to carefully consider what the consequences are going to be and what the risks to you are personally," Treanor told NCR in a recent interview.

"But this is a time when you also have to do the right thing," he added. "You have to stand up for your values and the values of the university."

Treanor made a forceful defense of Georgetown Law's First Amendment rights to determine its curriculum and live out its identity as a Jesuit institution in a March 6 letter he wrote to then-interim U.S. Attorney Edward Martin.

The letter, in which Treanor wrote that promoting serious and sustained discourse among people of different backgrounds was a "moral and educational imperative" for the university, garnered praise and support from students, alumni, faculty and staff.

"Other than a small handful of [negative] responses, everything I've received is positive," Treanor said.

> 'A great tradition of Jesuit universities is to try to make our society more diverse and inclusive, and the government doesn't get to tell us that we can't do that.'
> —William Treanor

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Recently, more than 18,000 people from across the country signed a petition expressing their support for Treanor, the dean emeritus of Georgetown Law who is still on the faculty.

The petition, organized by Faithful America, a Christian social justice advocacy nonprofit organization, commends Treanor for his "boldness and courage" in standing his ground against Martin's "reckless and illegal threats." The petition's cover letter adds that Treanor's witness "gives hope to social justice Christians" across the United States.

Several people who signed the petition offered personal words of encouragement.

"As an active practicing Catholic, I couldn't be prouder of your actions," wrote Mary Franceschini of Concord, California.

"Thank you for upholding the Constitution AND biblical teachings," wrote Dr. Carol H. Krinsky of New York City.

Treanor said he was moved by the fact that thousands of people of faith signed a petition to offer their support and solidarity.



William Treanor, dean emeritus of the Georgetown University Law Center (Courtesy of Georgetown Law Center)

"This is a really remarkable statement of the religious community about the importance of working because of our faith, to promote a society that's more diverse, equitable and inclusive," Treanor said.

Treanor said that he has not heard from Martin's successor, U.S. Attorney Jeanine Pirro.

The U.S. Attorney's Office in Washington, D.C., did not respond to a message from NCR seeking comment.

Pirro became the U.S. attorney in Washington, D.C., after Trump announced in May that he was withdrawing Martin's nomination to be confirmed as the top federal prosecutor for the District of Columbia.

Martin, a right-wing activist who is Catholic, had never served as a prosecutor before Trump appointed him in January to serve as the interim U.S. attorney in Washington, D.C. Trump had nominated Martin for the permanent job in February.

In May, however, it appeared unlikely that the Senate would confirm Martin after U.S. Sen. Thom Tills, a Republican from North Carolina, announced his opposition, which left Martin's nomination with not enough votes to be reported out of the Judiciary Committee.

During Martin's four-month tenure as an interim U.S. attorney, the New York Times reported, he also sent "vaguely threatening" letters to at least four medical journals, including the New England Journal of Medicine, that he accused of acting as "partisans in various scientific debates."

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Martin's letter to Treanor — dated Feb. 17 but not emailed until March 3 — described Georgetown Law's embrace of DEI principles as "unacceptable," and warned that students from law schools that "teach and utilize DEI" would not be considered for internships or employment.

Martin sent his letter amid the Trump administration's ongoing pressure campaign against higher education. Since January, the administration has threatened to withhold federal funding from universities and colleges that do not comply with demands that include scrapping programs that aim to further diversity, equity and inclusion.

Treanor said the administration's crackdown on DEI initiatives in higher education represents a direct threat to Georgetown University's mission as a Jesuit institution.

"A great tradition of Jesuit universities is to try to make our society more diverse and inclusive, and the government doesn't get to tell us that we can't do that," Treanor said. The U.S. Supreme Court, he said, has affirmed that among the freedoms central to a university's First Amendment rights are its abilities to determine, on academic grounds, who may teach, what to teach and how to teach it.

Over the last 50 years, Treanor added, Jesuit universities have developed initiatives focused on promoting diversity, equity and inclusion, as well as race-conscious

policies, to further their mission.

"So again, the idea that the administration would tell us that it decides whether or not we get to carry out our religious mission," Treanor said, "that is at odds with the role of government and the role of faith in our society."

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