



Members of the St. John's University chapter of the American Association of University Professors march May 1, 2026, in New York City. (Courtesy of the St. John's University chapter of the American Association of University Professors)



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The two faculty unions at St. John's University and the New York State Attorney General's Office are requesting a judge dismiss the federal lawsuit that the university filed in June against the state's labor relations board.

The attorney general and the unions argue that St. John's not only lacks standing to bring the case but they also say that because the university is a Catholic institution, it is not exempt from New York State labor law.

St. John's "radical proposal," the attorney general's office also said in [its Aug. 7 legal filing](#), further "undermines the fundamental labor rights afforded to all New Yorkers by the New York Constitution."

In [their own filing on Aug. 7](#), the American Association of University Professors chapter at St. John's University and the Faculty Association accused the university's administration of not being forthright in its legal arguments.

"In its efforts to evade its obligations under New York State's labor laws, the Employer misrepresents the extent to which its Catholic identity impacts its governance, curriculum, and the role and responsibilities of its faculty," the unions said.

On June 1, St. John's University, located in Queens, New York, and founded by the Vincentians in 1870, [sued the New York Public Employee Relations Board](#), citing religious grounds to prevent the board from enforcing the basic tenets of state labor law.

The university had been due to submit a response to an unfair labor practice complaint filed by the faculty unions. Instead, the school filed for an injunction in the Eastern District of New York to block enforcement by the state's Public Employee Relations Board. The university cited its First and 14th Amendment rights.

"At St. John's, ministry and mission are inseparable," the suit reads. "[PERB], however, seeks to subject St. John's to a regime of mandatory collective bargaining that impermissibly entangles the government (and the faculty unions) in its internal governance of religion- and Mission-related matters."

The lawsuit suggests that the state's jurisdiction over the university infringes on its Vincentian mission to ensure that "Catholic ideals and principles will penetrate and inform University activities wherever possible." Oral arguments in the case are scheduled for Oct. 8.

In April, the two faculty unions at St. John's University [filed an unfair labor practice complaint](#) charging the Catholic university with violating state labor law when it announced in February that it would no longer recognize the unions.

The unions' complaint accused the university of violating several sections of the New York State Employment Relations Act by withdrawing recognition of the unions; circumventing the collective bargaining agreement; unilaterally implementing new terms of employment, including salary changes; and interfering with faculty members' protected union activities.

On Feb. 19, St. John's University [notified employees that it would no longer recognize the unions](#). In an email to faculty members, university leaders said the decision to withdraw recognition of the unions had not been made "lightly or rashly," but that it was done to secure the university's long-term future.

In a June 1 court filing, Vincentian Fr. Aidan Rooney, the executive vice president for mission at St. John's University, said that while unions "often offer important protections for employees," it is the faculty that serves as "the main vehicle through which the University educates its students in its Catholic and Vincentian faith."

"Therefore, in this specific situation with faculty, the University cannot operate consistent with its Mission if it is obligated to share, or have scrutinized, internal management decisions regarding its Core Curriculum, hiring, tenure, discipline, or any other decision central to its Catholic and Vincentian Mission with a government agency or the Faculty Association at St.

John's University and the St. John's Chapter of the American Association of University Professors," Rooney wrote.

The unions and the university had been negotiating for about a year on a new contract to replace the collective bargaining agreement, which expired on June 30, 2025. The parties' last round of contract negotiations was in December.

In their Feb. 19 email, university leaders said there would be no further contract negotiations despite the unions' calls for the university to return to the bargaining table. The unions said university officials never informed them that they were considering withdrawing recognition "during the many months of bargaining."

In their Aug. 7 legal filing, the unions said the university's decision to withdraw recognition had caused "substantial unrest after decades of labor peace."

Throughout the spring and summer, faculty members participated in numerous job actions, including pickets and rallies that helped garner the support of other labor unions and elected officials.

The unions said they expect the unrest to continue "well into the next academic year."

"While many faculty are protesting," the unions also said in their legal filing, "many others are afraid to speak out given the Employer's assertion that faculty no longer enjoy even the most basic legal protections."

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