

Melissa Stevenson Diaz Remarks for 2/8 Town Hall Meeting

Good evening; I am Melissa Stevenson Diaz, class of '91. I'm joined by Estrellita Hudson Redus, '65, '75 and Dr. Yvonne Daniel, MA '75 to speak to you on behalf of the 460 Mills alums who have petitioned for an end to litigation between the AAMC and Mills College.

The petition is just as relevant today as it was when it was submitted last October.

We are asking AAMC leadership to tell us how they're spending donations that alums have given to the AAMC for decades. And we're asking the AAMC to stop using our funds to pay for litigation against the college. Not just the suit that was dismissed, but any future lawsuit. ***These steps must be taken before we can shape an AAMC that includes and respects ALL of us.***

For those who don't know me, I was active as a student at Mills, including becoming ASMC President just before the Strike.

After graduating from Mills, I served on the Board of Governors twice, was AAMC Vice President, and was elected as an Alumna Trustee, serving on the Board of Trustees from 2013-2016.

Professionally, my background is in city administration. I am the City Manager for Redwood City, and I am deeply grounded in issues of governance, accountability, and financial management for public entities. These principles apply directly to a membership organization such as the AAMC.

We began this petition during that horrible meeting on Sept 25, as attacks unfolded on Alumna Trustees, and when alums who opposed the lawsuit realized we were not going to be heard.

Within weeks 460 alums from 8 decades had signed on. Petitioners include alumnae who have served – or are now serving – as AAMC Presidents, Governors, Trustees, branch presidents, AAMC Executive Directors and staff, and Mills faculty and staff. We have given our time, and money, to build the AAMC over decades.

The petition calls for the AAMC to withdraw from any lawsuits against Mills College immediately, and for the AAMC to stop funding any lawsuit against Mills College.

It also asks the Board of Governors to provide current information about how much the litigation has cost and how it was funded. We want to know how much of our charitable donations were redirected to cover the cost of the AAMC's \$900/hour attorneys, and what's left in AAMC accounts.

We began planning for tonight's meeting in November. We were delighted to learn that the AAMC was dismissing its lawsuit, and Mills College dismissing its countersuit, early this year.

Unfortunately, there is a real risk of new litigation being initiated or supported by the AAMC. The Board of Governors has reserved the right to sue the College again.

The Board of Governors has not said they would oppose new litigation.

The Board of Governors is continuing to promote fundraising efforts which specifically state funds will be used for legal action.

Board Vice President Alexa Pagonas has publicly characterized the lawsuit dismissal as “only a ceasefire.”

We have every reason to believe the Board will use remaining donations for legal action.

The litigation produced three great tragedies:

One is that over \$1M of our charitable gifts were used without any constructive result. Based on information released to date, only 22% of the litigation was funded through fundraising as of November. And that’s just on our side! Mills must have spent that amount or more – all money that could have gone to supporting students and the alum community.

The second great tragedy is that by pursuing litigation, the AAMC has tacitly encouraged alums who demonized the College’s leadership and any alums who did not support the lawsuit. Some alums have burned down relationships with abandon. It will be years before that harm will be undone – if ever.

The third great tragedy is that by pursuing litigation and demonization, the AAMC has removed itself from meaningful influence on the merger process. By suing the College, AAMC has not been at the table to discuss how alums can be involved in the future of Mills at Northeastern. The AAMC has been left behind, losing relevance day by day.

As we look to the future, we need our Board of Governors *to be accountable to the AAMC membership*. The Board should take a stand against using charitable donations for legal action, should explain where our donations are going, and should oppose demonization of alums and College leaders. *Being accountable is a basic obligation and duty for our Governors.*

And we need our Board of Governors to conduct a vote that all alums can trust. There was considerable chaos regarding the vote attempted at the September meeting and we need to be sure that ballots submitted by mail now are verified as legitimate alum submissions, counted fairly, and reported promptly.

I hope that we can rebuild the AAMC. That begins with accountable leadership and commitment to reversing the disastrous course we have been on. I call on all alums to submit your ballot to reject further litigation and division.

I would now like to introduce Estrellita Hudson Redus, and thank her for her work to oppose the lawsuit and to support an inclusive and accountable AAMC.