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CAMPUS SAFETY GUIDE



for AFT Members at
Minority-Serving Institutions



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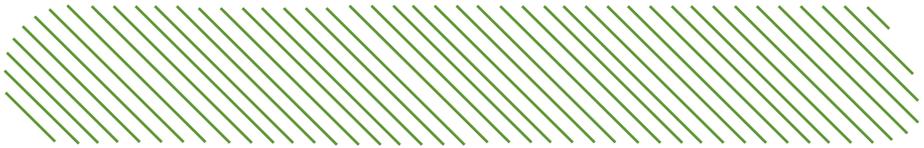
Our Mission

The AFT is a union of professionals that champions fairness; democracy; economic opportunity; and high-quality public education, healthcare and public services for our students, their families and our communities. We are committed to advancing these principles through community engagement, organizing, collective bargaining and political activism, and especially through the work our members do.

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CAMPUS SAFETY GUIDE

for AFT Members at
Minority-Serving Institutions



This guide is applicable to all types of minority-serving institutions, including historically Black colleges and universities, Hispanic-serving institutions, tribal colleges and universities, Asian American and Native American Pacific Islander-serving institutions, and other federally designated MSIs.



Purpose

This guide is designed to support AFT members working at all types of minority-serving institutions in navigating campus safety through a labor, racial justice and human rights lens. While each MSI local/chapter has its own history, community context and institutional governance structure, all MSIs operate within environments shaped by power, identity, politics and resources. This guide provides an overview of resources, emphasizing both individual awareness and collective action and solidarity..



Background

Workers at MSIs often operate in environments that are under-resourced and understaffed while also being subject to heightened political and public scrutiny. Many union members experience racialized, gendered and immigration-based harassment layered on top of their professional responsibilities. For some campuses, this also includes exposure to community trauma, violence or threats of violence, surveillance, or government intervention.

Safety at MSIs is especially critical in the current political climate, where debates over immigration, race, gender identity and academic freedom increasingly play out on college campuses. Many MSI workers and students were/are first-generation students, low-income, undocumented or from communities that have historically experienced overpolicing and inadequate protection. This makes physical safety, mental health support and freedom from harassment foundational, not optional, to their ability to learn and persist. When political rhetoric escalates into threats, surveillance or targeted legislation, workers at MSIs often sit at the intersection of these pressures. Ensuring clear protocols for crisis response, bias reporting and trauma-informed care is essential not only to prevent harm but to affirm that students' lives and identities are valued and protected.

At the same time, safety at MSIs must be understood as both protection from harm and ensuring the presence of conditions that allow workers and students to fully engage in civic and academic life. In a climate where teaching about race, history and social justice is being increasingly politicized, students and workers need assurance that classrooms remain spaces for rigorous, respectful dialogue rather than fear or self-censorship. Our union's commitment to member and student safety at MSIs is inseparable from MSIs' historical missions: to sustain access, equity and the democratic purpose of higher education itself.

Know Your Rights as a Union Member

As a union member, you have the right to a safe and nonhostile workplace. You also have the right to union representation in investigatory meetings under your Weingarten rights. You are protected from retaliation when you report unsafe conditions, and you are entitled to clear emergency procedures and regular safety training.

Keep your collective bargaining agreement accessible so you can reference it when issues arise. And be sure you know who your union steward and human resources contact are before you need them. When safety issues occur, it is important to document them immediately by recording the date, the time, the location, witnesses and the impact on your work or well-being.

If you are on a campus with an American Association of University Professors advocacy chapter, please reach out to your chapter for assistance.

Resources: [Know Your Weingarten Rights](#), [Know Your Weingarten Rights for reps](#)

**Some resources are accessible only through the AFT Higher Education eLearning community*



Personal and Physical Safety on Campus

Situational awareness is one of the most important tools for personal safety. Trust your instincts—discomfort is often your body’s way of processing risk. While on campus, it is important to remain aware of exits, lighting and access points in every building you enter. When working late, you should use campus escort services whenever they are available.

In moments of tension, de-escalation is often safer than confrontation. Keep your voice calm and steady, create physical distance when possible, and avoid arguing in situations that feel unsafe. If you feel threatened or uncomfortable, you should leave the area, go somewhere populated and call for help.

Resource: [AFT Health Hub](#)

Immediate safety checklist:

- If you or someone else is in immediate danger, call local emergency services first (e.g., 911 in the U.S.).
- Move to a safe, populated place if possible; do not engage with a violent or highly aggressive person.
- Recruit witnesses and keep documentation of their names and contact details.
- Preserve evidence: Take time-stamped photos/screenshots, save messages and voicemails, note locations and times.
- Notify your supervisor, campus public safety and your local AFT/AAUP representative.
- If you are a union member and the incident appears related to organizing or protected activity, report it to the union immediately.



Tip: Create a short “grab-and-go” safety card on your phone with emergency contacts and any medical/allergy notes needed.



Photo: Tim Pierce

Racialized, Political and Identity-Based Harassment

Faculty and staff at MSIs are especially vulnerable to harassment that is racialized, political, gender-based, or rooted in immigration status, religion, disability or sexual orientation. This can include microaggressions, slurs, intimidation or threats. These experiences are not just personal. They are workplace safety issues.

When harassment occurs, it is important to name the behavior clearly in reports by using specific language such as “racial slur,” “threat” or “retaliation.” You should preserve all evidence, including emails, screenshots, voicemails and the names of witnesses. Reports should be made to both human resources and your union. When students are involved, the dean of students office should be notified to investigate the matter further.

Resource: [Enforcement Guidance on Harassment in the Workplace- U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission](#), [AFT Health Hub: Workplace Bullying](#)

Labor Safety in Meetings and Supervisory Spaces

If a meeting with a supervisor shifts from routine discussion to disciplinary or investigatory questioning, you have the right to stop the conversation and request representation. You can say, “I request union representation before continuing.” You are not required to answer questions until a union representative is present.

If management pressures you to accept unsafe working conditions or excessive responsibilities, you should document the interaction and involve your steward immediately. You should not accept responsibility for broken systems or structural failures that are beyond your control.

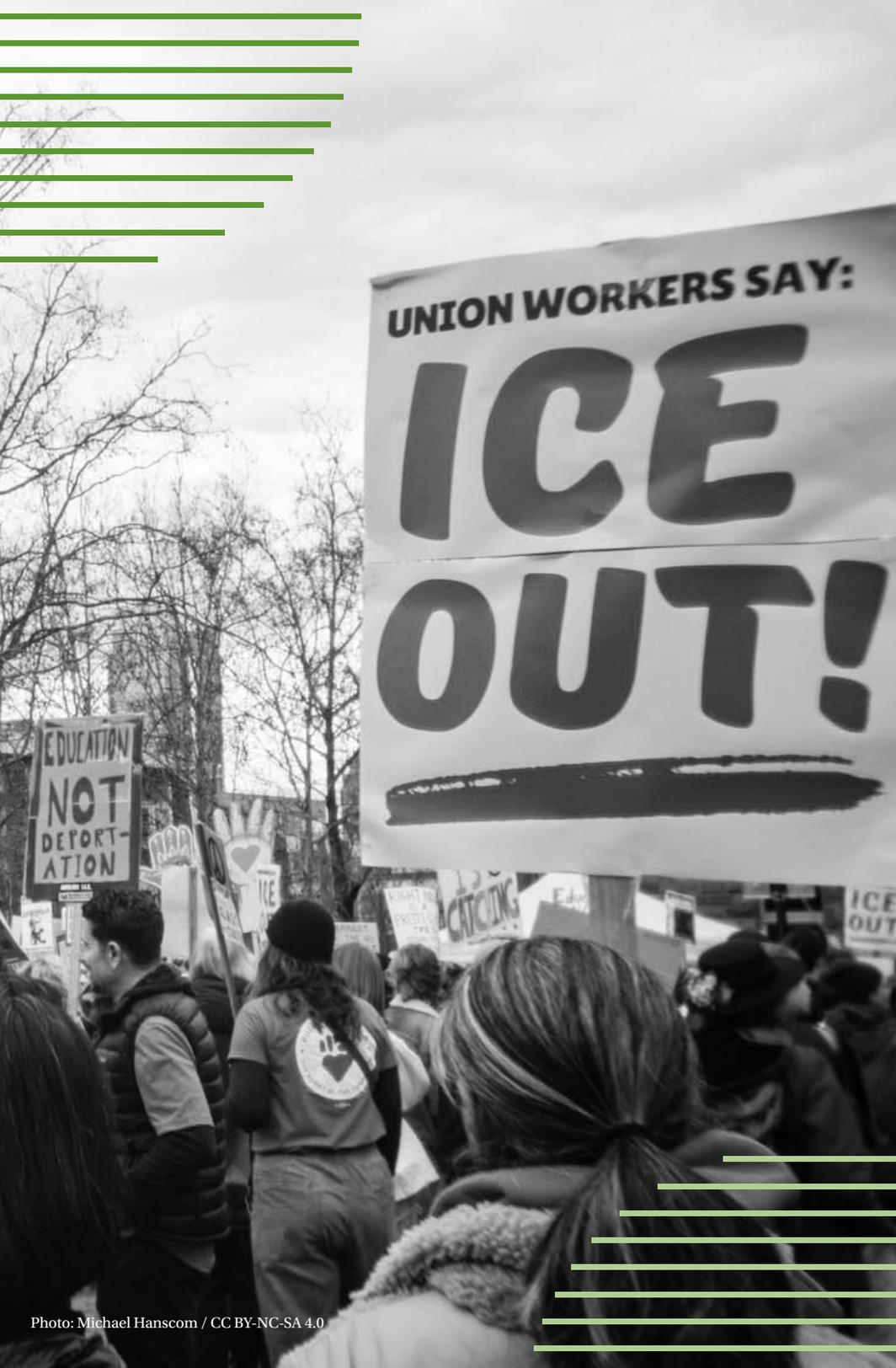
Resource: [AFT Grievance Guide](#)

Digital and Information Safety and Protection from Online Harassment

Digital safety is an essential part of workplace protection. You should use strong passwords and two-factor authentication on all professional accounts and avoid discussing sensitive union or student matters on personal devices or unsecured platforms. If you experience doxxing, online harassment, hacking or online threats, report them immediately to campus IT, campus police and your union/AAUP chapter.

Resources: [Democracy Security Project Safety Guides](#), [AFT Professional/Occupational Liability Insurance](#), [PEN America](#), [Faculty First Responders](#)





Immigration Enforcement Safety

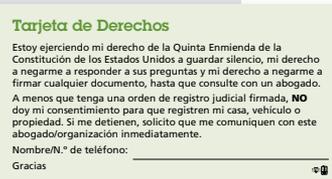
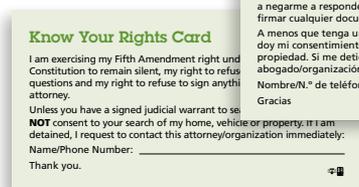
Many MSIs serve students, workers and families who are immigrants, undocumented, Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals recipients, international scholars, or from mixed-status households. Immigration enforcement activity can create fear and disruption on campus. Safety in this context means protecting privacy, dignity and legal rights.

As a worker, you generally do not have to answer questions from immigration agents without a warrant signed by a judge. You are not required to provide access to nonpublic areas such as residence halls and classrooms on campus without a signed criminal warrant. If agents arrive at your workplace, you should remain calm, avoid volunteering information, and immediately contact your union and campus legal counsel.

Never share student or employee records with outside agencies without authorization; federal regulations such as the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act and university policies restrict the sharing of such information. If you witness immigration enforcement activity on campus, you should document and/or record what you see, including time, location and badge names if visible, and notify your union immediately. Your union can help ensure that the institution follows sanctuary policies, privacy laws and due process requirements.

AFT members can also advocate for institutional policies that limit cooperation with immigration enforcement, provide know-your-rights training, and establish rapid response teams to support affected community members.

Resources: [AFT Immigration Resource Toolkit](#) (Scroll down to Resources for College Campuses), Share My Lesson's [CARE: Community Awareness, Readiness, and Education](#)





Crisis and Emergency Response

In the event of an active threat, the general guidance is to run if you can do so safely, hide if escape is not possible, and fight only as a last resort. If you experience harassment or stalking, you should report it to campus police and your union. In a medical emergency, call 911 and the campus emergency line. When you observe suspicious activity, trust your instincts and report it.

Be sure to know your campus emergency number, evacuation routes, and the locations of safe rooms and shelters in the buildings where you work.

Emotional exhaustion and burnout are workplace hazards. Use Employee Assistance programs or counseling resources when they are available, and take breaks and set boundaries around your labor. You cannot effectively protect others if you are depleted yourself.

Resources: [AFT eLearning Health and Safety Community portal](#) (access to trainings and resources), [AFT Health Hub: Mental Health resources](#), [AFT Member Benefits Trauma Counseling Programs and Services](#)

Collective Safety Through the Union

Safety is not only an individual responsibility; it is structural and collective. AFT members work daily to build safer campuses. Through collective action, bargaining, shared governance and building a coalition with students, members can push for regular safety audits, anti-retaliation language in contracts, trauma-informed supervision practices, fair staffing ratios, immigration safety protocols and expanded mental health resources.

Organizing is a form of protection, and solidarity is a safety strategy.

Resource: [AFT Higher Education organizing webpage](#)

Final Word

At MSIs, safety is shaped by race, power, labor and immigration status. The AFT and our affiliates organize for the safety of all communities. Safety in higher education is foundational to the role of education as a public good. When students and workers can learn, teach and serve without fear, retaliation or exclusion, institutions can fulfill their democratic mission of advancing equity, knowledge and opportunity for all.



This guide may be reproduced and distributed by locals as a non-exhaustive reference to help AFT members and union leaders at minority-serving institutions protect personal safety, access institutional supports, build collective power, and understand what resources their AFT membership can provide. Some resources links are only accessible through the AFT Higher Education eLearning community.



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