

## Concerning Brown's Agreement with the Federal Government

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We write to you as researchers and students affiliated with the Brown Reproductive Justice Collaborative and as people whose work is grounded in the principle of bodily autonomy. Although the University's voluntary resolution [agreement](#) with the U.S. government will allow many of us to return to some version of normalcy in our research, we are deeply concerned with its implications for the health and safety of some of the most vulnerable members of our student body, faculty and staff and for transgender peoples' rights writ large.

The agreement singles out transgender people, in particular transgender women, as an acceptable target for discrimination. This is not surprising; trans women are an [obsessive focus](#) of the Trump administration. From his first day in office, President Trump has taken actions to remove trans people — especially trans women and girls — from all aspects of public life. The University's agreement with the Trump administration invokes language from Executive Orders [14168](#), Defending Women from Gender Ideology Extremism and Restoring Biological Truth to the Federal Government, and [14201](#), Keeping Men Out of Women's Sports by identifying the mere physical presence of trans women as a threat to the safety of cisgender women. This has been proven false — there is no credible data to suggest that cisgender women are particularly vulnerable to victimization by trans women; [most](#) violence against cisgender women is committed by cisgender men. In fact, trans individuals are targeted with violence at a [rate](#) that is over four times higher than those who are cisgender.

In agreeing to the Trump administration's logic, the University tacitly accepts a harmful rationale that makes trans women even less safe while doing nothing to improve the safety or equitable treatment of cisgender women. Transgender women are women. This attempt to pit cisgender women against transgender women perpetuates an idea of "real womanhood" grounded in reproductive capacity that is sexist and reductive. In validating the notion that this fictional "real woman" requires protection from women who look different from her, the agreement opens the door to the policing of all women's appearances. It plants the seeds for a culture of surveillance while ignoring real threats to all women.

As the assault on transgender people's rights escalates with alarming [rapidity](#), it is worth remembering that smaller capitulations matter. They erode trans people's safety, bodily autonomy and sense of security — a feeling that, for most, is hard-won, tenuous and conditional. But these concessions also matter in the longer term, shifting cultural norms around acceptable treatment of trans people and laying the groundwork for future assaults on our communities. It is important to remember that the erosion of abortion rights in the U.S. did not begin with a full-force attack on *Roe v. Wade*. Anti-abortion activists [waged](#) a slow but comprehensive campaign of smaller legislative assaults on bodily autonomy, [building](#) legal precedents brick-by-brick over decades to arrive at [Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization](#) in June 2022.

We stand in a moment of impossible choices. Federal funding should never be wielded as a stick to force universities' compliance with unethical, inhumane policies. Despite the suboptimal circumstances, the University chose to find "agreement" with the Trump administration, and — in doing so — set the stage for further erosion of trans rights. We disagree with the University's decision. The reverberations of it will be felt long after this presidential administration is gone.

**Signed,**

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