

April 3, 2025

We are all law professors. (Each of us teaches at the University of Virginia School of Law, but we are writing in our individual capacities—not on behalf of the University or the Law School as an institution.) We are writing to affirm some core values that we share, including a commitment to taking law seriously and a belief in the importance of both legal institutions and civic discourse to a free society.

Like professors at other law schools, we are concerned by the recent federal executive orders that appear to target law firms and individual lawyers for retribution based either on the President’s grievances or on lawful and ethical representation of clients disfavored by the current administration. In the words of the preamble to the ABA Model Rules of Professional Conduct, “An independent legal profession is an important force in preserving government under law, for abuse of legal authority is more readily challenged by a profession whose members are not dependent on government for the right to practice.”

We also are concerned that these executive orders fit into a broader pattern of current threats to the rule of law, including the following:

- governmental actions that appear to be taken without regard for legal restrictions;
- governmental officials’ possible defiance of court orders, and explicit suggestions that such defiance is proper;
- use of discretion over criminal prosecution and punishment to shield the administration’s supporters and allies and to threaten the administration’s critics; and
- efforts to punish past critics and to encourage future submission through the use of power over government funds, licenses, contracts, buildings, visas, green cards, security clearances, and protection details for former government officials.

Partisans often defend norm-breaking by saying that the other side did it first. In our view, the current scale of norm-breaking and even law-breaking is unusual and troubling. But we hope that people who have a darker view of past practice or a rosier view of current events can agree that the relevant norms—such as the ideal that governmental power should not be used to reward one’s friends and to make life miserable for one’s opponents—are important and deserve support. The legal and ethical principles that underlie our concerns have previously been uncontroversial and should remain so.

Sincerely (alphabetically),

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Charles Barzun

Andrew Block

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Josh Bowers

Darryl Brown

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