

**\*\* This final version of the petition carries two amendments added subsequent to conversations between the Chancellor and Faculty Council on February 6, and between the organizers and the administration on February 24\*\***

### In Memory of Sayed Arif Faisal: A Call for Transformative Justice

On January 4th, 2023, Sayed Arif Faisal, a twenty-year-old UMass Boston student, was shot and killed by Cambridge Police in broad daylight. The official account of his murder is disquieting and has been challenged by Arif's family, his community, and Somerville civic leaders. Arif was experiencing a mental health crisis and seemed to be engaging in an act of self-harm. Arif was observed exiting his building through a window and cutting himself. Emergency services were called to the scene by a concerned party. Instead of a team of behavioral health first responders, six police cars and twelve officers were dispatched to the scene. The police were briefly caught on CCTV, chasing Arif, according to the reports, for several blocks. In their pursuit of him, the police shot a sponge round in an effort to "de-escalate" the situation, and then, when this proved unsuccessful, lethally shot Arif five times.

[Arif Faisal was one of our own](#), studying Computer Engineering in the College of Science and Mathematics and a beloved graduate of Somerville High School. Like many of our students, he came from an immigrant and working-class home. He lived with his family in Cambridge and worked to help support them financially, volunteering as well as an interpreter with both The Welcome Project and The Liaison Interpreters Program of Somerville. In deep solidarity with his family and community, we mourn his loss and are outraged by a police system that neither *protected* nor *served* him. What he needed was a team trained in emergency behavioral health intervention and de-escalation, but what he got was a violent police response. We therefore support calls that not only demand a full investigation of his murder but that seek the transformation of a racist and brutal policing system. Justice for Arif and his family must also include structural change.

On January 6th, UMass Boston's Office of the Vice-Chancellor for Student Affairs sent a campus-wide email informing the community of "the death of Sayed Arif Faisal." This email erased the violent and senseless circumstances in which Arif died at the hands of the Cambridge Police. It was silent about the police actions that were already being [condemned](#) by family and community members. Sajjad Sanid, a member of Bangladesh Association of New England, described Arif's murder in these terms: "Imagine losing your only child due to senseless police brutality. Imagine that. He was shot and killed by Cambridge police officers on January 4th in broad daylight." The administration's erasure of the violence faced by a South Asian Muslim immigrant, echoing the city's erasure of his murder, is a failure to act in line with the university's anti-racism mission, to defend our most vulnerable, and to honor the experiences of the marginalized.

We call on the Chancellor and his administration to exhibit leadership, courage, and clarity on the most pressing and ongoing issues of our time of which Arif's murder, and now Tyre Nichols's murder, are the most recent instances. We call on him to commit to a genuine

movement that brings about the healing and repair and an “anti-racist and health-promoting” vision sought to begin the process of both articulating and operationalizing on our campus, in our city, across our nation, and beyond.

We call on our faculty, staff and students to join us in proposing the below as a minimal response to this murder:

- We call upon our entire campus community to publicly honor Arif’s memory.
- We call on the Chancellor to denounce the murder of Sayed Arif Faisal and honor his life by issuing a meaningful public acknowledgment of what happened to him on January 4<sup>th</sup>.

*Amendment Feb 9: We urge the appropriate office to also plan a memorial service in consultation with Arif’s family and community as well as with concerned members of our campus community who are committed to honoring Arif.*

- We call for the creation of a scholarship fund and the holding of a memorial event in consultation with Arif’s family and community.
- We call upon our entire campus to support public and community [demands](#) for the development of a mental health crisis first responder unit that is not composed of police.
- We call for an increased availability of mental health services and counseling on our campus.
- ~~We call for a Campus-wide canceling of classes and meetings on Friday March 24, 2023, to hold a teach-in, and for faculty and students to lead town halls and workshops.~~
- *Amendment Feb 28: We call for a Campus-wide teach in on Friday March 24, 2023, for faculty to make it possible for students to attend if their instructional priorities allow, and for faculty and students to lead town halls and workshops, regarding:*
  - Approaches for addressing mental health crises in the community that do not involve police.
  - How anti-Black violence threatens the health and safety of everyone
  - Development of a mental health crisis first responder unit that is not composed of police
  - The presence of police on our campus. (Such a forum must address what their presence means for our most vulnerable students, and whether this can be reconciled with our status as a sanctuary campus for DACA students.)
  - A curricular response to addressing and connecting these overlapping and intersectional issues
- We call for a campus-wide Sankofa Conversation to discuss how to move forward collectively.