

Press Release
For Immediate Release
March 19, 2024
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Esteemed, Award-Winning Local Professors at UMass Boston Charge the Administration with Discrimination, Retaliation, And Harassment

BOSTON--The only full-time faculty in the Africana Studies at the University of Massachusetts Boston (UMass Boston), Dr. Jemadari Kamara, Dr. Tony Menelik Van Der Meer, and Dr. Keith Jones have filed complaints with the Massachusetts Commission Against Discrimination (MCAD). After repeated attempts to meet with the Chancellor and Provost to resolve their institutional hostility toward the Africana Studies Department, these full-time faculty have been left with no other recourse than to seek justice by means of legal remedy.

“This filing comes after years of efforts to engage in a restorative justice process with the administration. The situation, however, has only deteriorated, and we are a department under siege. It is shocking that a public university in Massachusetts would engage in retaliatory and discriminatory behavior against professors seeking only to bring a vision of justice and equity to UMass Boston’s campus culture,” said Professor Jemadari Kamara.

“The administration’s actions have deeply harmed our reputation and leadership capacity on campus. The university must be held responsible for the damage it has caused not only to us individually but to the racial justice work we tried to initiate across campus.”

This action follows the Massachusetts Teacher’s Association (MTA) filing of complaints with the Massachusetts Department of Labor for unfair labor practices related to retaliation by the University of Massachusetts. MTA lawyers suggest that for the first time in the history of the UMass system all full-time faculty of any department have simultaneously filed cases with the Massachusetts Department of Labor.

The attorney for the Africana Studies full-time faculty, John Pavlos says, “At this historical moment, to have my clients facing employment-based discrimination, racial bias, hostile work environment and retaliation by University of Massachusetts administration is not only illegal; it is absolutely appalling and shameful. Massachusetts is not Florida.” Pavlos added, “Such hostility and retaliation has caused significant harm to their personal lives and professional reputations.”

A press conference will be held at 1pm on Wednesday, March 20th, at UMass Boston, 4th floor, Phillis Wheatley Hall, room 102.

For more information call John Pavlos at 508-930-6465.

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Africana Studies Professors at UMass Boston Charge the Administration with Discrimination, Retaliation, And Harassment

March 20, 2024

A Massachusetts Commission Against Discrimination (MCAD) claim has been filed by ALL full-time faculty members of the Africana Studies Department at the University of Massachusetts Boston (UMB). After repeated attempts to address institutional harm in restorative ways, these three distinguished faculty members, two of whom were recently awarded the Chancellor's Distinguished Service Award (2021), have felt it necessary to file formal complaints as a result of continued retaliation, intimidation, and marginalization by the UMB administration.

The administration's perpetuation of a hostile work environment includes recent outrageous disciplinary actions taken against the two most esteemed senior faculty members of the department who, together, have more than sixty years of service to UMB. These recent disciplinary actions follow a long pattern of hostility, disrespect, and exclusion by the administration.

Additionally, such toxic work conditions have compelled all full-time faculty in the department to file labor grievances with the Massachusetts Labor Relations Board (MLRB) through UMB's Faculty Staff Union (FSU). These filings, according to the FSU, mark the first time in the history of the institution that ALL full-time faculty members of any department have simultaneously filed labor grievances with the MLRB against the administration.

The following lists only the most recent assaults on the department and its faculty:

- Cancellation, without precedence, of TWO departmental searches in Africana Studies (November 2020 & March 2022)
- Demotion as well as reduction of salary of a full-time faculty member after being named the co-recipient of the Chancellor's Distinguished Service Award (June 2022)
- Removal of the department's elected chair (September 2022)
- Disciplinary action taken by the provost against a full-time faculty member for *allegedly* unauthorized personal travel to Cuba (May 2023)
- Disciplinary action taken by the provost against a full-time faculty member for *allegedly* refusing to play a recorded video from the chancellor at a campus-wide departmental event (May 2023)
- Provost of UMass Boston pursuing disciplinary charges against department faculty members while serving as the judge in the grievance procedures without recusing himself due to his bias and conflict of interest
- Refusal of the provost to include Africana Studies faculty from serving on the department's most recent search committee despite the UMB Faculty Council's and the College of Liberal Art's Senate's near-unanimous vote supporting full departmental inclusion.

The retaliation and discrimination faced by the department's full-time faculty reflects a clear national pattern of retaliation against those who helped call for and lead racial justice initiatives that followed in the wake of George Floyd's murder. In the midst of these crises, rather than collaborating with a department which had initiated a Restorative Justice Framework as well as a Sankofa Conversation Series on Structural Racism, the administration contracted a private law firm to conduct a secret report of the department, paying over \$250,000. Simultaneously, the administration cut the Africana Studies Department's course offerings by nearly 30%.