



January 31, 2026

President Henry Bienen  
Dean Eric G. Neilson, MD  
Arthur J. Rubloff Building  
420 E. Superior St.  
Chicago, IL 60611

Dear President Bienen and Dean Neilson:

On behalf of the Asian American Scholar Forum (AASF)<sup>1</sup>, the Federation of Asian Professor Associations (FAPA)<sup>2</sup>, and the faculty signatories below, we write to express our concern about the recent allegations by the Estate of Dr. Jane Ying Wu regarding Northwestern University's treatment of the deceased Dr. Wu, a prominent scientist and U.S. citizen. We are concerned that the pattern of treatment alleged in the complaint indicates a disregard for the principle that one is innocent until proven guilty. The alleged treatment of Dr. Wu is inconsistent with her status as one of very few endowed Asian American women professors and her nineteen years of contributions as a tenured faculty member at the Feinberg School. Northwestern University and Northwestern Memorial Hospital's (NMH) treatment of Dr. Wu has shocked many in the research community and resulted in fear within the academic and research community, especially those of Asian descent.

We respectfully request that Northwestern publicly acknowledges and apologizes for their unjust treatment of Dr. Wu, and amends internal policies and procedures to prevent future tragedies and better protect their faculty and staff, including within the Northwestern Office of Civil Rights. Moreover, we

<sup>1</sup> The Asian American Scholar Forum is a national non-profit, non-partisan organization that works to promote belonging, freedom, and equality for all. We are a leading national non-profit providing a voice for the Asian American scholar, scientific, and research community with Congress, federal government, media, research institutions, the civil rights space, and the broader general public. AASF has provided critical expertise and data reports on the talent pipeline, science & technology, anti-profiling, and research security issues, bridging scientific and academic expertise with the legal and civil rights community. Our members are prominent leaders from the National Academies of Science, Engineering, and Medicine, the American Academy of Arts & Sciences, as well as past and current university presidents, provosts, vice provosts, deans, associate deans, department chairs, and recipients of prestigious awards and honors. AASF is a member of the National Council of Asian Pacific Americans (NCAPA), and a Task Force member with the responsibility of helping the Congressionally mandated Commission to Study the Potential Creation of a National Museum of Asian Pacific American History and Culture.

<sup>2</sup> FAPA is an alliance of 19 (and growing) university associations representing faculty of Asian, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander heritage at accredited universities and academic institutions in the United States. It is a non-profit organization. FAPA promotes open collaboration in education, scholarship, and professional development, advocates for and safeguards academic freedom and legal rights of faculty of Asian, Native Hawaiian, and/or Pacific Islander heritage at accredited academic institutions, and supports their career advancement.

provide this letter to offer additional context from the Asian American and broader scholar, scientific, and research community.

According to recent reports, the NIH began an administrative investigation of Dr. Wu in 2019.<sup>3</sup> Based on these reports, Dr. Wu was not charged following the NIH investigation.<sup>4</sup> Despite this, Northwestern University allegedly conducted a number of concerning actions against Dr. Wu during and after this investigation, despite her ultimately never being accused of any wrongdoing.<sup>5</sup> These efforts include “limiting her work, partly closing her lab space, breaking up her research team and reassigning her grants to white, male faculty colleagues and isolating her”.<sup>6</sup>

Even more concerning is that Northwestern University allegedly continued to punish Dr. Wu even after the close of the NIH investigation in 2023. After the conclusion of the NIH investigation in December 2023, it was reported that “[her] grants were not returned to her” and her lab was “shut down by May 2024, preventing her from applying for new NIH funding”.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, Northwestern University allegedly “cut her salary and raised new requirements she had to meet to restore her funded status”.<sup>8</sup> Even more concerning are the report allegations that “university and Chicago police removed [Dr.] Wu from her office in handcuffs” and then “admitted against her will to the psychiatric unit of Northwestern Memorial Hospital” “without notifying loved ones or consulting outside doctors”.<sup>9</sup> Weeks after her release, Dr. Wu took her own life.<sup>10</sup>

Dr. Wu was not only a brilliant scientist who loved her work and had dreams to help others through science, but also a loving mother. Her daughter, Elizabeth Rao, born in California and raised in the Midwest, described memories of her mother to NBC News, sharing how her mother would “turn[] simple houses into warm homes” and how the “two would also sing along to tunes during long drives”.<sup>11</sup> This is a loss that can never be rectified for the family, but we hope we can live up to her memory. As her daughter said to NBC, “We carry this with us: her upstanding morals and conviction to fight against injustice.”<sup>12</sup>

We are concerned that these reports indicate not only that Northwestern University failed to protect Dr. Wu during an unjustified government investigation, but also that Northwestern University directly violated Dr. Wu’s rights by treating her as a guilty party during and after her investigation, potentially based on her gender and ethnicity. This treatment was apparently without any other justification as Dr.

<sup>3</sup> Kimmy Yam, *After Northwestern scientist questioned for China ties died by suicide, family sues and speaks out*, NBC NEWS, Jul. 12, 2025, <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/asian-america/northwestern-jane-wu-lab-suicide-lawsuit-rcna217636>; Kate Armanini, *Northwestern sued over suicide of professor targeted in China investigation*, CHICAGO TRIBUNE, Jul. 4, 2025, <https://www.chicagotribune.com/2025/07/04/northwestern-sued-suicide-china-investigation/>; Hope Perry, *Estate of professor sues Northwestern after researcher’s 2024 death*, EVANSTON ROUNDTABLE, Aug. 24, 2025, <https://evanstonroundtable.com/2025/08/24/jane-wu-northwestern-discrimination-lawsuit/>; William Tong, *Estate of Feinberg professor sues University for discrimination, role in suicide*, THE DAILY NORTHWESTERN, Jun. 26, 2025, <https://dailynorthwestern.com/2025/06/26/campus/estate-of-feinberg-professor-sues-university-for-discrimination-role-in-suicide/>; William Tong, *Federal investigation, lab closure pressure, preceded Northwestern Feinberg professor’s death*, THE DAILY NORTHWESTERN, Aug. 17, 2025, <https://dailynorthwestern.com/2025/08/17/featured-stories/in-focus/federal-investigation-lab-closure-preceded-northwestern-feinberg-profs-death/>.

<sup>4</sup> *Id.*

<sup>5</sup> *Id.*

<sup>6</sup> *Id.*

<sup>7</sup> *Id.*

<sup>8</sup> *Id.*

<sup>9</sup> *Id.*

<sup>10</sup> *Id.*

<sup>11</sup> *Id.*

<sup>12</sup> *Id.*

Wu was never charged with any crimes despite a four year long investigation. If true, this deprivation of Dr. Wu's due process rights and human dignity is fundamentally incompatible with Northwestern University's stated priority of "invest[ing] in [its] employees," as well as its commitment to "fostering an environment in which all members of [its] community are safe, secure and free."<sup>13</sup> It also diminishes Dr. Wu's nearly two decades of service to Northwestern University's community, dedicated mentorship, and groundbreaking research. By piercing the safety and security of faculty, the procedural failures revealed through Northwestern University's treatment of Dr. Wu undermine the environment necessary for the development of science and have severe impacts that extend beyond Dr. Wu and her family.

We also write to provide broader context on the national climate. AASF, FAPA, and the broader research community have been deeply concerned about widespread unjust scrutiny of Asian American researchers, including under the now defunct Department of Justice's China Initiative. Under the Initiative, scientists and academics with connections to China were painted as national security threats regardless of any wrongdoing.<sup>14</sup> What happened to Dr. Wu was a part of a nationwide xenophobia and wave of investigations against Asian Americans that was exacerbated by the Initiative.<sup>15</sup> We caution against criminalizing Asian American and immigrant scholars, and fear from the lives that could be lost and the families ruined. We must learn from the lessons of the past, not reverse the progress we have made. Not only was there a human cost to the Initiative, but also a harm to our ability to retain and attract talents, thereby hurting U.S. leadership in science and technology.<sup>16</sup> Universities have an obligation to ensure that their faculty can conduct their research safely and effectively and should protect their scholars from unfounded investigations and assumptions of guilt without due process.

At a moment when Asian American and immigrant scholars have experienced years of targeting and unjust heightened scrutiny, it is critical that universities follow appropriate due process to prevent the repeat of history. As a university whose professor was unjustly targeted by the China Initiative, we urge Northwestern University to do the right thing, and we hope that other universities learn from stories like Dr. Wu's to better protect their faculty in the future.

Sincerely,

***On behalf of the Asian American Scholar Forum (AASF), the Federation of Asian Professors Association (FAPA) & Below Faculty Signatories.***

<https://aasforum.org/>

<sup>13</sup> Northwestern Vision, Northwestern University, <https://www.northwestern.edu/about/mission-vision-priorities/>; Wu\_1-1\_Ex. A NU Discrimination Policy Pages, *Wu v. Northwestern University*, 2025L007963, at 3 (Filed: 06/23/25).

<sup>14</sup> Department of Justice, Infomation about the Department of Justice's China Initiative and a Compilation of China-Related Prosecutions Since 2018, <https://www.justice.gov/archives/nsd/information-about-department-justice-s-china-initiative-and-compilation-china-related#:~:text=The%20Department%20of%20Justice's%20China%20Initiative%20reflects%20the%20strategic%20priority%20the%20Administration%20concerning%20China's%20practices>; Eileen Guo, Jess Aloe & Karen Hao, *The US crackdown on Chinese economic espionage is a mess. We have the data to show it.*, MIT TECHNOLOGY REVIEW, Dec. 2, 2021. <https://www.technologyreview.com/2021/12/02/1040656/china-initiative-us-justice-department/>

<sup>15</sup> Kimmy Yam, *After Northwestern scientist questioned for China ties died by suicide, family sues and speaks out*, NBC NEWS, Jul. 12, 2025, <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/asian-america/northwestern-jane-wu-lab-suicide-lawsuit-rcna217636>.

<sup>16</sup> Xie, et al., *Caught in the crossfire: Fears of Chinese-American scientists*, Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America, April 18, 2023. Featured in the Wall Street Journal, the study obtained responses from 1,304 Chinese American researchers employed by U.S. universities, and found that although 89% of the respondents would like to contribute to U.S. leadership in science and technology, 72% do not feel safe as an academic researcher with 42 percent feeling fearful of conducting research in the U.S.