



1300 East 9th St., Suite 1100
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Dear Attorney General Carr, District Attorney Boston, District Attorney Willis, and Prosecuting Attorneys' Council Chair Mosley,

The Southeast Conference of the United Church of Christ, headquartered in Atlanta, GA, along with its denominational officers, and clergy within the Atlanta area and beyond, call upon you with a moral urgency informed by our faith to act in accord with what is just and right. Immediately stop the prosecution against the three bail fund organizers from the Atlanta Solidarity Fund and the more than 40 persons facing domestic terrorism charges for their activism in seeking to protect the Weelaunee Forest.

We are a denomination of 4,800 congregations with a number of churches in the Atlanta area who are part of a tradition that provided a faith home for many of those who founded our nation and who led acts of civil disobedience like the Boston Tea Party. We are deeply concerned that these charges appear unrelated to public safety and strongly related to suppressing the right to dissent and protest. Beyond the lack of legal justification, these charges run counter to broadly shared values for people of faith and conscience.

As clergy, we are aware of how these charges trample upon the history of past struggles for justice. During the civil rights movement, activists and community members raised bail funds to free Martin Luther King, Jr. and others from jail. To arrest and prosecute activists raising bail funds is a brazen attempt to stifle the voices of those opposing current government actions and is a prime example of state repression.

The arrest of the bail fund organizers escalates earlier tactics that also run counter to past histories of struggle. Georgia instituted the domestic terrorism statute in response to the attack of a Black church by White supremacists. The clear intentions behind this statute were that it would not be used against peaceful protestors such as the more than 40 forest protectors now being charged.

We cannot passively witness the law being manipulated and contorted for unjust and immoral political purposes. We, therefore, stand in opposition to such abuses of power as we stand for justice and the right to peacefully protest.

The separation of moral and legal concerns from political motivations was plainly evident when Atlanta Assistant Police Chief Carven Tyrus stated the reason for the domestic terrorism charges:

"None of those people live here. They do not have a vested interest in this property, and we show that time and time again. Why is an individual from Los Angeles, California, concerned about a training facility being built in the state of Georgia? And that is why we consider that domestic terrorism."

As we consider what is at stake with the domestic terrorism charges, we are cognizant of the severe penalty they impose with a mandatory minimum sentence of five years and the possibility of sentences extending up to 35 years in prison. We are also cognizant of the extreme gravity of the situation faced by the three bail fund organizers who are being charged with money laundering and charity fraud. They face the risk of up to 20 years in prison along with considerable fines.

As faith leaders, we cannot ignore the serious consequences that these charges pose for those who sought to exercise their rights, and for those who sought to care for these individuals through the charitable collection of bail funds. In short, we cannot abide by the criminalization of protest and acts of care. The convictions of our faith and conscience compel us to speak out. We resolutely stand against the prosecutions being waged and call for all charges to be dropped.

Signed,

Rev. Kimberly Wood

Rev. Dr. John C. Dorhauer

Rev. Dr. Karen Georgia A. Thompson

Rev. Traci D. Blackmon

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