

## Declaration of Concern

Feb. 24, 2022

A search for a new president for any institution is a challenging endeavor. It is therefore natural that when such a search is compromised in its thoroughness and transparency, concerned parties are obligated to speak out. We write this letter on behalf of the unions that represent all major employee groups at Montgomery College, including full-time faculty, part-time faculty, and staff. Two of the signatories to this letter served on the presidential search committee that recommended Dr. Jermaine Williams (among others) to the Board of Trustees who ultimately chose him as the next president of the college. While there is a tendency to support the process of which we were a part, after deliberation we have reached consensus that the process resulting in the selection of Dr. Williams was flawed. Based on concerns of our constituents, we have decided that as the elected representatives of the faculty and staff of Montgomery College, it is important that we make our views public now, mindful of the fact that Dr. Williams will start his term as president on February 28, 2022. We do so in a spirit of cooperation and shared concern for the future of the institution.

In our view, the presidential search committee did not have enough data to make an informed decision about the presidency. The committee was restricted to resumes and other materials provided directly by the candidates. The decision by the college administration and the Board of Trustees not to have a public forum on the candidates precluded the possibility that additional information might emerge. In the case of Dr. Williams, it ensured that negative information that could have thrown his candidacy into question did not come to light.

One source of such information is The Nassau Community College Federation of Teachers website<sup>1</sup>, the college where Dr. Williams served briefly as president. The website shares the concerns that led to a stunning public [Letter of Discontent](#). This letter was signed by the elected leaders of the faculty unions, department chairs, and Academic Senate and calls for the immediate removal of Dr. Williams, stating that the morale at NCC is at its lowest in decades. The letter continues by alleging that Dr. Williams's policies, enacted unilaterally, have seriously damaged the college in areas of student success, academic programming, college community health and safety, and financial integrity. Significantly, this letter was not written by a marginal group of discontented employees speaking only for themselves, but by the elected faculty leaders writing in their official capacity.

We have examined this letter of protest along with public testimony by those who took a vote of no confidence in Dr. Williams at Nassau Community College. We are concerned that BOT President Michael Knapp dismissed the letter of protest and all evidence against Dr. Williams as "spirited debates about important matters," and, in an [article that appeared in \*Bethesda Magazine\*](#), refers to the elected leaders of the NCC faculty as "someone who is disgruntled."

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<sup>1</sup> <https://nccft.org/2021/12/15/letter-of-discontent/>

Further, Mr. Knapp states that he “can’t tell you why they’re disgruntled,”<sup>2</sup> which is puzzling because through words and video, many people made it abundantly clear why they felt dissatisfied with the performance of Dr. Williams. This raises the important question as to whether Greenwood/Asher & Associate and/or our Board of Trustees fully performed the due diligence necessary in hiring the new college president. Given the strong ties between the college and the county, one would hope at the very least that Mr. Knapp would appreciate the amount of research and supporting evidence involved when faculty leadership make such accusations and requests. Again, had the Board of Trustees, instead of conducting a completely confidential Presidential search process, chosen to host at least one public forum for top candidates, this information certainly would have come to light before the hiring process was complete. More transparency would have given the college community a much better understanding of the decision by the BOT.

This background on Dr. Williams is provided to shed light on the decision-making process made by the Board. For the sake of transparency, we wish to point out that prior to the search, a significant connection between Dr. Dukes and Dr. Williams already existed; she served as his mentor at the Aspen Institute’s Fellows Program. Dr. Cain, who worked with the BOT to manage the search, was also enrolled in the same class. Dr. Dukes has also been retained by the BOT as a transition mentor for Dr. Williams as he starts his position at the college. Despite their established relationship, this is a puzzling decision as the college has a strong cadre of staff in our Governmental Relations Office and faculty to assist in the transition, and Dr. Dukes, in her seven-month position as interim president has limited institutional experience at MC.

As elected representatives of the unions for full-time faculty, part-time faculty, and staff, we are concerned that the BOT did not consider these matters when reviewing the applicants. Perhaps there was some review or investigation, but in a process without transparency, we do not know. We share these views out of pride for Montgomery College and with the best of intentions towards its future growth. We recognize that the health of our college is tied to the success of our new president and wish him success. We would rather focus on empowering students to change their lives, but actions and events lead us to speak out from our concern for the reputation and long-term stability of the college, both of which allow us to achieve our primary goal of supporting our students’ ability to succeed.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://bethesdamagazine.com/bethesda-beat/schools/montgomery-college-backs-new-president-despite-faculty-criticism-at-ny-school-he-left/>