

## **Open Letter opposing Preet Bharara's invitation to speak at CUNY School of Law**

Dear CUNY School of Law Administrators and the Sorensen Center for International Peace and Justice:

It has recently come to our attention that on Tuesday September 19th, CUNY School of Law will be welcoming Preet Bharara, former U.S. Attorney for the Southern District of New York, to speak at an event hosted by the Sorensen Center titled "Public Corruption and the Rule of Law." As students committed to social justice, we are disheartened to learn that our school, which is dedicated to teaching us "Law in the Service of Human Needs," has permitted the Sorensen Center to invite a speaker whose work has brought devastation to communities of color, without considering how his presence will affect students directly impacted by his policies and reflect upon the reputation of students within the broader public interest community. We are opposed to the Sorensen Center, an entity housed within CUNY Law, funding this event as well as the use of CUNY Law's reputation, logo, and space. Although Bharara is credited as a prosecutor who serves the public interest, we do not believe this is an accurate characterization given his track record of surveilling and prosecuting the communities whose members include CUNY students and those that we love. It is telling that Bharara has been willing to "help" victims of financial crimes but not victims of systemic race and class oppression, and we believe that his invitation to campus reveals that the school's true interests belie its public interest motto.

While we recognize that Bharara "stood up" to Trump, we find it bemusing that his own record has not been scrutinized for unfairly wielding the law. As the U.S. Attorney for the Southern District, Bharara has used his power to promote mass incarceration, to [aid](#) powerful bankers, and [refuse to prosecute](#) the police officer who murdered 18-year-old Ramarley Graham. Preet Bharara's office has systematically [prosecuted teenagers of color](#) based on assumptions of gang membership drawn simply from what they wore or where they lived. Yet, he [failed to bring this aggressiveness](#) to Wall Street, where he chose not to file criminal charges against even a single high-level banker. Lastly, Bharara himself is no champion of ethics or fairness. Ross Barkan of the Village Voice has [highlighted](#) Bharara's delight of being jury, judge and executioner. Bharara was known for leaking cases to the media so that the public would assume whomever he prosecuted was guilty. In fact, Judge Valerie Caproni chided Bharara for "playing fast and loose with the ethical rules that govern their conduct."

We chose to attend CUNY School of Law because of its mission to support and prepare lawyers practicing "law in the service of human needs." CUNY has a history of training defense attorneys, policymakers, and legal service providers working with and serving New York City's most vulnerable communities. As such, it is deeply disheartening that the law school is allowing this event to uplift the voice of a person who has unjustly surveilled and imprisoned poor, black and brown New Yorkers. To create a platform for Preet Bharara effectively redefines "public interest" to include discriminatory policing and prosecution, which we find particularly disturbing. We are writing to express our most sincere opposition to his presence at Tuesday's event.

We demand that CUNY School of Law and the Sorensen Center immediately cancel the event. In the case that it cannot be canceled, we demand considerable time for students to ask questions during the event. Furthermore, we ask that you agree to a meeting with members of the undersigned student organizations; work with student representatives to formalize a policy and procedure by which students, faculty and the Sorensen Center work collaboratively to select future campus speakers; and issue an explanation of your decision to invite Bharara to campus that directly addresses his role in unjustly criminalizing communities of color.

Sincerely,

CUNY National Lawyers Guild

CUNY Black Law Students Association

CUNY Labor Coalition

Luis DeGraffe Racial and Social Justice Orientation

CUNY OutLaws

CUNY Law Students for Justice in Palestine

CUNY Police Accountability Organization