

**Congress of the United States**  
**Washington, DC 20515**

October 28, 2022

The Honorable Merrick Garland  
Attorney General  
U.S. Department of Justice  
950 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW  
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Attorney General Garland:

We write to urge you to conduct an expedited and independent review of the unfounded search of eighteen Shaw University students earlier this month, as well as a pattern-of-practice investigation of the Spartanburg County Sheriff's Office, which conducted the search.

Shaw University, an HBCU in Raleigh, North Carolina, had chartered a bus to drive these students to the Center for Financial Advancement Conference in Atlanta. On October 5<sup>th</sup>, their bus was pulled over for a minor traffic violation in Spartanburg County, South Carolina. At this point, multiple deputies and drug-sniffing dogs searched the belongings of the students and staff in the vehicle. No illicit materials were found, and the students were left unnerved, confused, and humiliated. We are deeply troubled by this unfounded search of Shaw students.

This incident has understandably provoked a strong reaction at Shaw and in the wider Raleigh community. In her remarks about the search, Shaw President Paulette Dillard said “[T]his scene is reminiscent of the 1950s and 1960s—armed police, interrogating innocent Black students, conducting searches without probable cause, and blood-thirsty dogs. It’s hard to imagine. Yet, it happened to the Shaw University community, and it is happening throughout this nation in alarming fashion. It must be stopped.” Governor Roy Cooper, who also served as North Carolina Attorney General for sixteen years, said through a spokesperson that he “shares the deep concern of Shaw University leaders about the treatment and safety of their students,” and he has asked North Carolina Public Safety officials to express that concern to South Carolina law enforcement. To that end, we reiterate support for a DOJ investigation into this incident and any systemic patterns of misconduct by the Spartanburg County Sheriff's Office.

Unfortunately, this is not the first allegation of racial bias against the Spartanburg County Sheriff's Office. In 2014, a Black former detention officer in the county filed a lawsuit—resulting in a settlement—claiming that the office used racial slurs and provided him with inadequate training compared to white deputies. In 2020, there was community outcry when Sheriff Chuck Wright said, “We had every opportunity to kill two Black men and we did not do it,” while defending how deputies handled two arrests. These incidents, coupled with the recent unfounded search of the Shaw students, indicate a need to further investigate the Sheriff's Office.

We believe transparency and accountability are necessary for ensuring justice for the Shaw students directly involved in the incident, as well as the larger Shaw and Raleigh communities.

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,



Deborah K. Ross  
Member of Congress



Alma S. Adams, Ph.D.  
Member of Congress



David E. Price  
Member of Congress



G. K. Butterfield  
Member of Congress



Kathy Manning  
Member of Congress