



OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT
BROWN UNIVERSITY

CHRISTINA H. PAXSON, PRESIDENT

October 15, 2025

The Honorable Linda E. McMahon
Secretary of Education

Ms. May Mailman
Deputy Assistant to the President & Senior Policy Strategist

Mr. Vincent Haley
Assistant to the President and Director, Domestic Policy Council

Dear Secretary McMahon, Ms. Mailman and Mr. Haley:

I am writing in response to your letter of October 1, 2025, inviting Brown University to provide feedback on the *Compact for Academic Excellence in Higher Education*. The goal stated in the letter conveying the Compact is “to renew and strengthen the vital, mutually beneficial relationship between the U.S. Government and higher education that is essential to our nation’s future and success.”

I share this goal and strongly agree with the importance of sustaining a relationship that historically has made our country’s education and research enterprise the best in the world. Indeed, soon after the transition to the current federal administration, I affirmed that Brown would work with the government to find solutions if there were concerns about the way the University fulfills its academic mission. I remain committed to contributing to national conversations about principles for improving American higher education.

On July 30, Brown signed a voluntary resolution agreement with the government that advances a number of the high-level principles articulated in the Compact, while maintaining core tenets of academic freedom and self-governance that have sustained the excellence of American higher education across generations. We asserted our commitment to equality of opportunity in admissions and hiring while sustaining a respectful community that is free of harassment and discrimination, safeguarding Brown’s ability to cultivate a vibrant intellectual environment in which faculty and students can study and express the widest possible range of views. We pledged to take meaningful steps to ensure our continued compliance with Title VI and Title IX throughout our programs, which is directly aligned with our mission to advance knowledge and understanding through

education and research at the highest levels of integrity and excellence. And we committed to funding for workforce development in Rhode Island, also aligned with our mission.

Beyond the principles expressed in our July 30 agreement, we also understand the Compact's focus on the rising costs of education, and we continue to be responsive to concerns about affordability and access. Financial aid has been among the fastest-growing areas of Brown's budget in the past decade. We admit undergraduate students without consideration of their financial circumstances; all financial aid awards are loan-free and based solely on economic need; and we have targeted initiatives serving rural students and veterans, including doubling the number of undergraduate student veterans in recent years with expanded aid that funds full scholarships.

But while a number of provisions in the Compact reflect similar principles as the July agreement — as well as our own commitments to affordability and the free exchange of ideas — I am concerned that the Compact by its nature and by various provisions would restrict academic freedom and undermine the autonomy of Brown's governance, critically compromising our ability to fulfill our mission. In return for Brown signing the July agreement, the federal government restored the University's research funding and permanently closed three pending investigations into shared ancestry discrimination and race discrimination. But most important, Brown's existing agreement with the federal government expressly affirms the government's lack of authority to dictate our curriculum or the content of academic speech — a principle that is not reflected in the Compact.

Additionally, a fundamental part of academic excellence is awarding research funding on the merits of the research being proposed. The cover letter describing the Compact contemplates funding research on criteria other than the soundness and likely impact of research, which would ultimately damage the health and prosperity of Americans. Our current agreement with the federal government — beyond restoring Brown's research funding from the National Institutes of Health — affirms the University's ability to compete fairly for new research grants in the future, a doctrine of fairness and a commitment to excellence that aligns with our values.

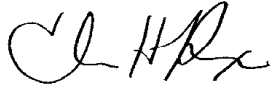
Therefore, while we value our long-held and well-regarded partnership with the federal government, Brown is respectfully declining to join the Compact. We remain committed to the July agreement and its preservation of Brown's core values in ways that the Compact — in any form — fundamentally would not.

My decision to decline participation in the Compact aligns with the views of the vast majority of Brown stakeholders. The Brown community will remain focused on meeting the established commitments under the July 30 agreement, while safeguarding our mission

and foundational academic values. At the same time, I remain dedicated to participating in any dialogue that is anchored in these values as discussions continue about how to improve American higher education.

I maintain the firm belief that American colleges and universities are a cornerstone of innovation, growth, prosperity and national security for our nation. Brown is committed to maintaining the excellence of our nation's colleges and universities.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'CH Paxson', written in a cursive style.

Christina H. Paxson
President
Brown University