

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

September 28, 2022

Ms. Carmen Twillie Ambar
President
Oberlin College and Conservatory
70 N. Professor St.
Oberlin, OH 44074
cambar@oberlin.edu

Oberlin College and Conservatory Board of Trustees
Office of the Vice President
70 N. Professor St.
Oberlin, OH 44074.
secretary.office@oberlin.edu

Dear President Ambar and Members of the Board of Trustees,

We write to express concern regarding Mohammad Jafar Mahallati, a Professor of Religion and a Presidential Scholar in Islamic Studies at Oberlin College. Specifically, we are disturbed by Mr. Mahallati's well-documented involvement in human rights abuses while part of the government of the Islamic Republic of Iran and his continued support for Iran's tyrannical regime while under your employment. Even more troubling is Oberlin College's apparent decision to whitewash Mr. Mahallati's actions when these concerns were made known to you, raising serious questions about the ideals of Oberlin college and its willingness to allow foreign interference on its campus.

Mr. Mahallati's connections with one of America's chief adversaries are not a secret. Indeed, Mr. Mahallati served as Iran's Ambassador to the United Nations from 1987 to 1989. During his tenure, the Iranian government carried out a systematic extermination of political prisoners and other dissidents.¹ Human Rights Watch estimated that the deaths range between about 2,800 and 4,500.² Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, and Canada's parliament labeled these mass killings as crimes against humanity. Despite the clear and overwhelming evidence that

¹ "Iran: Blood-soaked secrets: Why Iran's 1988 prison massacres are ongoing crimes against humanity," December 4, 2018, Index Number: MDE 13/9421/2018. Available at:

<https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde13/9421/2018/en/>

² "Pour-Mohammadi and the 1988 Prison Massacres," By Human Rights Watch. Available at:

https://www.hrw.org/legacy/backgrounder/mena/iran1205/2.htm#_ftnref14

these events were occurring, Mr. Mahallati dismissed these atrocities as “nothing but propaganda” and “fake information.”³

Even more alarming than Mr. Mahallati’s clear role in covering up this tragic human rights abuse is Oberlin’s decision to ignore it. In October 2021, Oberlin claimed it had concluded its own investigation and found “no evidence to corroborate the allegations against Professor Mahallati, including that he had specific knowledge of the murders taking place in Iran.”⁴ Oberlin’s “investigation,” however, appeared to be nothing more than a cursory review of these matters, seemingly ignoring the clear evidence of these actions.

Mr. Mahallati’s past denial of the 1988 massacre is just one example of his questionable character. As Iran’s Ambassador to the United Nations, he defended the then Iranian leader Ruhollah Khomeini’s ruling to kill the famed author Salman Rushdie. Mr. Rushdie was tragically stabbed on August 12, 2022 in broad daylight by an Iranian regime sympathizer.⁵

All this raises serious concerns about Mr. Mahallati’s employment at Oberlin College and about the Iranian regime’s infiltration of our higher education system. According to publicly available information, Mr. Mahallati’s professorial post appeared to have been tailor-made for him in 2007. Further, throughout Mr. Mahallati’s tenure at Oberlin, he has maintained close association with Tehran’s tyrannical regime.

In fact, it was recently reported by an investigative journalist that Mr. Mahallati serves on the board of an Iran-based journal, *Sepehr-e-Siasat*, with other senior Iranian regime officials connected to Iran’s Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC), an organization designated as a Foreign Terrorist Organization by the U.S. State Department. The journal has openly praised Hezbollah, another designated Foreign Terrorist Organization supported by Iran.

Despite the fact that the journal attempted to scrub Mr. Mahallati’s name as soon as his association with it was reported, Mr. Mahallati makes no secret of his loyalty to the Iranian regime. For example, in a 2018 open letter to Ali Larijani, the Speaker of the Islamic Consultative Assembly, Mr. Mahallati asked the Speaker to censor a critic who suggested he may be insufficiently loyal to the regime.⁶ In an even more recent interview, Mr. Mahallati flatly refused to condemn or even acknowledge the regime’s well documented, ongoing human rights abuses and instead only accused the United States of committing “atrocities” against Iran.

While academic freedom is deeply cherished in our country, Mr. Mahallati’s current association with and his open loyalty to the Iranian regime causes serious national security concerns. It also

³ "Iran: Blood-soaked secrets: Why Iran’s 1988 prison massacres are ongoing crimes against humanity," December 4, 2018, Index Number: MDE 13/9421/2018. Available at: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde13/9421/2018/en/>

⁴ "College Finds No Evidence of Wrongdoing in Mahallati Investigation," By: Gigi Ewing, October 15, 2021. Available at: <https://oberlinreview.org/24980/news/college-finds-no-evidence-of-wrongdoing-in-mahallati-investigation/>

⁵ <https://www.foxnews.com/world/oberlin-colleges-professor-peace-endorsed-fatwa-murder-salman-rushdie>

⁶ "Open Letter from the Former Iranian Representative to the United Nations to Larijani on the Investigation of Dual Citizens," Iranian Students' News Agency. Available at: <https://www.isna.ir/news/97030100395/-نامه-سرگشاده-نماینده-> [بیشین-ایران-در-سازمان-ممل-به-لاریجانی-در-باره](https://www.isna.ir/news/97030100395/-نامه-سرگشاده-نماینده-بیشین-ایران-در-سازمان-ممل-به-لاریجانی-در-باره)

puts into question Oberlin's reporting of foreign funding: any omissions from this report would violate section 117 of the *Higher Education Act*. Moreover, it raises questions including whether the Iranian regime played a role in his employment at Oberlin and whether federal taxpayer dollars should be provided to a college that goes to such great lengths to protect and defend an Iranian regime affiliate.

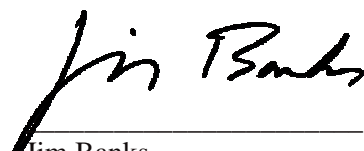
The United States has a clear interest in refusing to coddle human rights violators, and Congress has repeatedly raised concerns about domestic political interference from hostile foreign regimes on our college campuses. It is utterly perplexing that Oberlin so obstinately harbors Mr. Mahallati, an individual with such a disgraceful past and of questionable current allegiance.

We ask Oberlin to make available to the public all of Mr. Mahallati's course syllabi to date and address the following questions:

- 1) Has Oberlin College received any funding or in-kind contributions from the Islamic Republic of Iran or from individuals or entities linked to the Islamic Republic of Iran?
- 2) What is the vetting process in place at Oberlin for hiring faculty, and are there additional processes for those closely linked to a hostile foreign regime?
- 3) What is the funding source for Mr. Mahallati's endowed professorship, as such a post previously did not exist? Please provide all documents and financial statements related to his professorship.
- 4) What led to the hiring of Mr. Mahallati at Oberlin in 2007? What are the terms and conditions of Mr. Mahallati's employment at Oberlin? Please provide all contracts associated with his employment at Oberlin.

Please provide a response no later than two weeks after the date of this letter.

Sincerely,



Jim Banks
Member of Congress
Member, Committee on Education & Labor



Dr. Virginia Foxx
Member of Congress
Ranking Member, Committee on Education & Labor