

Emory University Professors Challenge Their Wrongful Arrests and Prosecutions

04.23.2026 (PRESS RELEASE) – Today, Emory University Professors Noëlle McAfee, Emil’ Keme, and Caroline Fohlin filed a lawsuit seeking justice for Emory University’s decision to arrest and prosecute them, after they sought to protect Emory students from violence during a 2024 on-campus protest.

Professor McAfee is Professor of Philosophy, Past-President of the University Senate, and Past-Chair of the Faculty Council. Professor Keme is Professor of English and Indigenous Studies. Professor Fohlin is Professor of Economics. All three are full Professors with tenure.

In 2024, Emory’s *Respect for Open Expression Policy* expressed “Emory’s unwavering commitment to a community that inspires and supports courageous inquiry through open expression, dissent, and protest.” On April 25, 2024, however, during a protest on campus, University leaders called the Atlanta Police Department and Georgia State Patrol to violently crackdown on student speech.

Professor McAfee came to the quad because she was worried that Emory would call in the police as a first option, rather than a last resort. Professor Keme was there to monitor his students’ and colleagues’ safety, because he knew that officers had been violent at past protests on campus. Professor Fohlin heard from her husband that a phalanx of police vehicles was rushing toward campus. As the mother of a child then enrolled at Columbia University, who had seen violent arrests at that campus, Professor Fohlin went to the quad to observe.

When Professor McAfee saw a law enforcement officer tackle a young person and pummel them without justification, the mother in her said, “stop!” For this she was arrested by an APD officer and charged with disorderly conduct by an Emory Police Officer. A photo of her being led away in handcuffs is here:



Professor Keme saw officers destroying things, pushing people, and shooting bullets or pellets with pepper spray as they drove persons out of the quad. He went to help an older woman who was struggling (later identified as a senior lecturer), and complied with law enforcement requests to leave the quad. He was arrested anyway and criminally charged.

Professor Fohlin observed a very large, uniformed officer crushing a young person on the pavement. The officer's leg and knee were on the young man's head and neck. It looked like he couldn't breathe. This is the scene she saw:



When she spoke up, Emory Police Officer Tim Haxton grabbed her wrist, pulled her, and threw her to the ground, slamming the left side of her head and face onto the pavement. The violent takedown is shown here:



Professor Fohlin sustained permanent injuries from which she is still seeking to recover. She was charged with battery of a law enforcement—falsely accused of striking an officer. It took more than a year for prosecutors to drop the charge.

In their suit, Plaintiffs seek accountability for Emory’s decision—now a pattern—of calling outside law enforcement to suppress the open expression of Emory students and faculty members. They want the University they have served faithfully for so long to be a place where people can speak up without risking police violence.

Quotes from Plaintiffs:

Professor Noëlle McAfee: “I went out on the quad that morning hoping that Emory would not, once again, in violation of its own policies, call in outside police forces to shut down a peaceful student demonstration. Sadly, I was wrong.”

“I was arrested while participating in a peaceful protest in April 2024, in support of students’ right to free expression and to peacefully protest,” said Professor Emil’ Keme. “My actions reflected my commitment to Emory’s stated mission of thinking beyond oneself and supporting the greater good, and my belief that universities have a responsibility to uphold spaces where students can speak and be heard.”

“I was traumatized by an Emory Police Department sergeant acting at the behest of Emory University’s then-leadership,” Professor Caroline Fohlin

stated. “Despite what happened in 2024, I remain dedicated to my students, my colleagues, and our mission. I have high hopes that the University can recommit itself to its stated purpose: to create, preserve, teach, and apply knowledge in the service of humanity.”

The lawsuit was filed by Mitchell Shapiro Greenamyre & Funt, LLP in midtown Atlanta, Georgia. It is pending in the State Court of DeKalb County. A copy of the filing is available at www.mitchellshapiro.com.

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