

PRESS RELEASE  
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
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## Save Mills College Coalition Supports Student Lawsuit, Calls on Attorney General Rob Bonta to Intervene in Mills College

Oakland, CA – The Save Mills College Coalition (SMCC) supports the students of Mills College, and the class action lawsuit filed by the law firms of Bryan Schwartz, Esq. and Nichols Kaster, PLLP on Wednesday, May 11 in Alameda County Superior Court. The lawsuit alleges that the College administration engaged in rampant deception of students throughout the proposed acquisition by Northeastern University. As the legal filing indicates, this has cost some students tens of thousands of dollars and years of their education, and meant drastic changes to their future.

[Read court filings related to the hearing](#)

One of the many disturbing allegations includes a conversation with President Beth Hillman, where a student in Mills’ Education program, one of the many cancelled degree programs under Northeastern, requested the president’s help -

*On or about February 14, 2022, the Plaintiff met with President Hillman to share the impact of Defendant’s actions on her and other students. The Plaintiff told President Hillman what Defendant’s actions meant for her future plans to become a teacher and asked President Hillman for her help. President Hillman explained that she expected Mills at Northeastern University to have an education department at some point in a couple of years. The Plaintiff asked her about what that timeline meant for current students like herself, who would not be able to get their teaching credential from Mills. In response, President Hillman said something to the effect of “**unfortunately some students are no longer a fit for Mills, and it sounds like you are one of those students.**”*

“Students believed in Mills’ mission, values, and progressive reputation as a historic women’s liberal arts college, and have sacrificed and spent hard-earned money to come here. Instead, they suffered a shocking level of mismanagement and misinformation by this administration,” said Cynthia Mahood Levin, Mills alumna and President of SMCC. “We are outraged that students had to bring a lawsuit to address the serious harm caused by Hillman’s administration, but we fully support their efforts to seek justice.”

### **Mills never needed to close or be acquired.**

The harm caused by the Hillman administration isn’t limited to students. Two independent financial analyses have confirmed that the **College leadership mischaracterized the College’s financial status, which it then used to justify rushing into acquisition talks.**

Last March, President Hillman suddenly announced the closure of Mills, citing “economic burdens,” and characterizing its financial health as dire. Mills’ acquisition by Northeastern University was touted as saving the College from a financial cliff.

This was despite the fact that **Mills' endowment was valued at \$226M and had grown over \$39M in the last year alone.** Mills had just been reaccredited until 2028 by the WASC Senior College and University Commission (WSCUC), and auditors had rated its financial health as 2.9 out of 3, an almost perfect score, in the Department of Education's Financial Responsibility Composite Score just two months before the closure announcement. Mills' operating revenue of \$56M in 2021 ranked higher than 94% of private nonprofit colleges with similar enrollment size in the United States, according to US Department of Education data. As of last year's audit, Mills is cash positive and successfully paid down its debt.

Nevertheless, "trustees for the College were claiming that Mills wouldn't be able to make payroll in a month or two, unless Northeastern acquired it," said Kieran Turan, Vice President of SMCC. "We've known for the past year that this entire thing did not add up, and that the administration's plan for Mills would actually put the College into a death spiral."

**Contrary to the administration's claims, the Northeastern deal is not a merger, it's an acquisition.**

"In one stroke, Northeastern would appropriate billions of dollars in assets on Mills' campus, just for paying off Mills' debt of only \$30M. Mills was intended to serve women's education, not to be traded on the open market for pennies," said Claudia L. Mercado, member of SMCC and Mills' Alumnae Association. "The administration seems far more intent on monetizing Mills than in its educational mission."

Moreover, the acquisition would shut out many students in the Bay Area that Mills now serves. **Northeastern has the 6<sup>th</sup> highest net tuition in the United States.** The acquisition would mean the loss of Mills' designation as a Hispanic Serving Institution, and an end to Mills' notable diversity, which is 65% students of color, 45% first-generation, and 17% non-traditional aged students.

**"At this time in history, when women's rights are again under assault, we cannot afford to lose an institution whose sole mission is the education and empowerment of women," said Mahood Levin.**

The Save Mills College Coalition calls on California lawmakers and Attorney General Rob Bonta to intervene to protect historic Mills College and its students – and to replace current officers and trustees as part of an overall effort to stabilize the College, so it can continue to serve its historic mission for generations to come.

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EMAIL TO PRESS

We wanted to make you aware of the student lawsuit against Mills College. Details on the lawsuit filing can be found in the attached press releases from SMCC and the law firm.

<https://www.savemillscollege.org>

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