

On Sat, Jun 2, 2018 at 12:01 AM, Benjamin Pauli <bpauli@kettering.edu> wrote:

Academic friends,

I'm writing to you in an appeal for solidarity as people who work in and around Flint. All of you are, I believe, familiar up to a point with some of the drama that has gone on with Marc Edwards over the past two-plus years. It would take more space than I have here to fill in all the details but the basic facts are these:

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But this email is only indirectly about Edwards' attacks on FACHEP. It is really about Flint residents and activists. Some of the activists who have been involved with this issue recently put together a letter that has been sent to a variety of professional scientific and engineering organizations, asking for "protection from Mr. Edwards" and an "immediate investigation" of his behavior that includes "academics, professionals, and Environmental Justice leaders." As I write this email, it has been signed by about 50 residents and a number of non-resident supporters. The number of signatures continues to climb. (Incidentally, I have submitted my own signature, but the document has not yet been updated to include it.)

<http://www.flintcomplaints.com/>

The reason why I'm writing to you is that the residents who have been brave enough to sign this letter really need support from allies in academia. Melissa Mays, one of the signees, has already started receiving aggressive emails from Edwards in response to the letter. Surely, there is more to come. Furthermore, the press release sent out a few days ago to announce the letter failed to get any traction. In order for their voices to be heard, residents need a boost--as they did in the summer of 2015--from people who are more likely than they are to be taken seriously. Contesting someone of Edwards' "heroic" stature, who has exercised almost unchallenged control over perceptions of Flint within the scientific community and the media for almost three years, is no small matter.

So here is what I am suggesting. I am hoping you will consider signing a very simple letter that expresses your support of residents' request for help. You do not necessarily have to agree with every aspect of their (or my) analysis of the situation. You need only believe that they are entitled to be heard by the people they are petitioning. I imagine the letter being sent to the media and to the organizations already petitioned by residents. Here is a draft of the kind of statement I had in mind (feel free to make suggestions):

It has come to our attention that Flint residents are seeking to file a formal complaint against Professor Marc Edwards of Virginia Tech and requesting that members of the scientific and engineering communities conduct an investigation into Professor Edwards' actions relating to his work in Flint. As academics who have done work in and around Flint, we wish to affirm Flint residents' right to be heard on this matter. We hope that members of the scientific and engineering communities will take immediate and appropriate action to investigate residents' concerns.

Given the ugliness of the situation, I can imagine that you may not be enthusiastic about lending your name to this cause. What I will say, without getting into details, is that the tide is starting to turn against Edwards' unethical behavior in some very significant ways. There are people in high places listening right now and a statement like this could make a very big impact on them. It would also be a huge boon to the many residents who feel like their voices have been stolen, or who have been subjected to active abuse.

So while I do not wish to pressure you (and I appreciate that some of you are in a more secure position than others), I do wish to invite you to lend your voice to what I believe has become a critical part of the struggle for justice in Flint. Serious blowback from Edwards is coming, and I believe we have a responsibility to fortify Flint residents and activists against it as much as we are able.

Thank you, and my apologies for the long message,

Ben

P.S. Please keep this communication confidential for the time being, given the sensitivity of the situation. If there are others you believe should be invited to participate, however, please let me know (it's very possible that in my haste I forgot people).