Trump administration seeks to jail Michigan 12 defendant Zainab Hakim on new evidence-tampering charge

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22 November 2026

Federal prosecutors went to court in Ann Arbor on November 18 seeking to jail Zainab Hakim, one of 12 anti-genocide protesters charged over the campaign to get the University of Michigan to divest from Israel. That morning a grand jury charged Hakim with attempting to destroy a laptop while she was free on bond. Hakim left court free after her attorney challenged the FBI's account of what agents found in her apartment.

All 12 face up to five years in federal prison on a charge of conspiring to transmit threats. The prosecution cites graffiti and property damage at the homes and offices of university officials and at businesses targeted by divestment protesters. Among the acts prosecutors cite as evidence of conspiracy are two defendants' alleged edits to a press statement about a protest.

The indictment made public in June named Hakim, her sister Amatullah Hakim, Paige Feyock, Ahmet Korkaya, Jonathan Zou, Alexander Sepulveda, Mariam Odeh and Colin Weger. All eight pleaded not guilty. A second indictment unsealed October 30 added Henry David MacKeen-Shapiro, Aaron Vonbargen, Joseph Fisher and Srishti Sharma.

The new count against Hakim stems from an October FBI raid on the apartment she shared with MacKeen-Shapiro. Prosecutors allege that Hakim tried to destroy his laptop as agents sought entry. They say agents recovered it in her bedroom and suggested it had been immersed in water.

At the bond hearing, defense attorney Amanda Bashi challenged that account. According to Michigan Advance reporter Ben Solis, Bashi told the court that agents found a wet bag lying on top of the laptop. The area around the computer was dry, as was Hakim. Prosecutors acknowledged that when they presented the case to the grand jury, they had yet to obtain chemical tests for evidence of immersion.

Images from agents' body cameras showed Hakim and other residents at the front door cooperating with the FBI. Defense witnesses said agents commended the residents for their cooperation. Bashi asked US District Judge Judith Levy to examine the grand jury testimony to determine what the grand jury had been told about the raid. Levy ordered both sides to submit briefs on her authority to review the testimony and adjourned the bond hearing until December 2.

Federal prosecutors demand graduate workers' records

The federal investigation has reached thousands of workers at the university. On November 13, *The Intercept* published grand jury subpoenas served in August on the Graduate Employees' Organization (GEO), which represents graduate instructors and staff assistants, and its parent union, the American Federation of Teachers (AFT). Assistant US Attorney Margaret Smith and FBI Special Agent Kara Phipps, both involved in the Michigan 12 investigation, sought the records.

The demands go back to January 2023, nine months before the onslaught on Gaza began. They cover GEO's membership lists, officers' payroll records, financial audits and minutes of membership and executive board meetings. The indictment does not name GEO. The union belongs to the Tahrir Coalition, a campus organization campaigning for divestment that prosecutors cite repeatedly in federal filings.

GEO moved to quash the subpoena and disclosed on October 12 that the government had demanded the same records from the AFT. GEO President Hiab Teshome told *The Intercept* she believed prosecutors were trying to bypass the local by going to the national office. After the report appeared, the AFT issued a two-sentence statement: "We support our local and the motion to quash. We are not commenting on this ongoing case." The statement left unanswered whether the national office had turned over any records.

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The record of the AFT apparatus is not one of defending its members. In 2023, the GEO/AFT leadership conspired with the university administration and Democratic Party operatives to impose a sellout contract on striking graduate student instructors, ending a walkout that could have won real gains. The 2026 negotiations have been stalled for months: the contract covering more than 3,300 graduate student workers expired on May 1, and the GEO/AFT leadership has announced no plans to walk out, advancing a corporatist proposal for a stake in the university's $25 billion endowment, while the university offers a meager 1.5 percent increase and proposes benefit cuts.

Faculty vote no confidence in campus police

The subpoenas figured prominently in a resolution adopted by the University of Michigan Faculty Senate. When voting closed on November 12, 1,042 faculty members had voted in favor, 747 against and 636 had abstained. The resolution refers to the original eight defendants and describes the accusations against them as "wildly exaggerated charges of conspiracy." Faculty members pledged individual contributions to their legal defense.

The resolution declares no confidence in the university police and in the administration's handling of contract negotiations with GEO. Faculty cited the university's collaboration with Washtenaw County Prosecutor Eli Savit in bringing felony embezzlement and false pretenses charges against Teshome, who served on the union's bargaining team. A judge dismissed the charges on August 6. That same day, federal prosecutors issued the subpoenas for the union's records.

The vote is a public repudiation of the university's role in the persecution of its own students and workers. That persecution spans two administrations. The Biden administration armed and politically supported the Israeli genocide in Gaza, which has killed more than 74,000 people, according to official figures, and oversaw the nationwide crackdown on pro-Palestinian protests. Michigan's Democratic Attorney General Dana Nessel brought felony charges against campus protesters. She dropped those charges in May 2025. The University of Michigan Board of Regents, largely Democratic, spent at least $800,000 on plainclothes operatives from the private security firm City Shield to spy on pro-Palestinian protesters, banned Students Allied for Freedom and Equality (SAFE), the local chapter of the national pro-Palestinian group, Students for Justice in Palestine (SJP), issued trespass bans and brought disciplinary charges. When the federal indictment was unsealed in June, the Democrats either endorsed the witch-hunt or remained silent.

Under Trump, federal prosecutors are now demanding records that could identify every graduate worker who belonged to the union, including those who never attended a divestment protest.

The faculty resolution points to Minnesota, where undercover federal agents posed as protesters to spy on meetings in union halls and churches after the murders of Renee Good and Alex Pretti. Agents secretly recorded political discussions, compiled dossiers on protesters and obtained years of union financial records. In its drive to criminalize all political opposition to Trump's immigration Gestapo, the Department of Homeland Security presented a grand jury with a chart labeling 18 unions and political and community groups part of "The Conspiracy."

Across the country a worker or student deciding whether to speak at a union meeting against a deportation raid or the bombing of Gaza now has to reckon with the possibility that the FBI will demand the minutes. Autoworkers, teachers and healthcare workers have a direct interest in the defense of the Michigan 12 and the graduate workers whose records the government is seeking.

The Socialist Equality Party and the International Youth and Students for Social Equality call for all charges against the Michigan 12 to be dropped, the subpoenas against GEO and the AFT to be quashed and an end to the persecution of anti-war protesters nationwide. The faculty vote shows the support that can be mobilized. Students and campus workers must turn to workers throughout Michigan and internationally to organize a political fight independent of the Democratic Party and the union bureaucracy against the assault on democratic rights and the capitalist system that produces war.

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