

More than 10,000 Christians petition Boston College to reject Koch grant

by [Aysha Khan](#) in the [January 15, 2020](#) issue



Students participate in a rally outside the O'Neill Library at Boston College that was organized November 14, 2019 by Climate Justice for Boston College and other campus groups against the administration's acceptance of Koch Foundation funding. (RNS/Aysha Khan)

More than 10,000 Christians have signed a petition urging officials at Boston College to reject a potential donation from the Koch Foundation toward the Jesuit university's political science department.

The online Christian social justice organization Faithful America submitted the signatures to school administrators on December 12, arguing that accepting money

from the libertarian multibillionaire Koch family is “completely antithetical to BC’s Jesuit ideals.”

“Koch Industries is among the country’s biggest climate polluters,” the petition argues. “Its leaders, billionaires Charles Koch and his late brother David, have spent their fortune electing climate deniers, fighting labor unions, and pushing America towards the right—not the values a Christian school should stand for.”

The political science department’s proposal, which has not yet been finalized and submitted to the Koch Foundation, did not indicate how much funding is being requested.

The donation would fund research for the political science department’s New Perspectives on U.S. Grand Strategy and Great Power Politics initiative.

“As a former BC department head and Jesuit educated alum, I regret that you would take money from a company that has spent billions to raise doubt on the impact of fossil fuel on climate,” said Donald Mikes of Scituate, Massachusetts, who signed the petition and has formerly served as the school’s director of audio-visual services. “Would you take tobacco money, too? What happened to your ethics?”

The Faithful America petition was also signed by John McDargh, who currently teaches at the Boston College School of Theology and Ministry.

“I have been proud and grateful for the opportunity to teach in the theology (department) of BC for 40 years,” McDargh said. “To take money from the Koch enterprise feels antithetical to the values that have informed generations of students who have been challenged to be women and men ‘for others’ and ‘with others’—not the political agenda of the Koch Foundation.”

More than 1,050 students and other BC community members signed a separate petition, which was delivered to the university’s administration December 13, denouncing the grant.

“Students are heartened to see external support in opposition to the Koch donation,” the students behind the Freedom over Funding petition told RNS. “Student voices are integral, but outside pressure is only fueling our fire! . . . Our university should consider whether the Koch Foundation is truly making this donation in the interest of serving others or for their own self interest.”

In December, the school's international studies academic advisory board voted not to participate in the Koch-funded program, which proposed a five-year joint hire by the political science department and the international studies program.

A group of professors from multiple departments, calling itself Faculty for Justice, has also moved against the grant. And a campus rally in the fall against the grant drew some 150 community members.

Students at the university reached out to UnKoch My Campus, a national nonprofit pushing for transparency and ethics in donations to higher educational institutions, to support their campaign. The organization is also working with a number of other Catholic institutions, including Saint Louis University, Santa Clara University, College of the Holy Cross, and Catholic University of America, to disaffiliate from Koch funding or stop proposed Koch-funded projects.

Boston College did not respond to a request for comment after the Faithful America petition was submitted. In November, ahead of the campus rally, university representatives told RNS that the program was "well-supported" by political science faculty.

"Faculty advocates view the proposal as a means of funding an important research topic," Jack Dunn, a university spokesman, told RNS in November. "They have confirmed with colleagues at Notre Dame, Georgetown, and MIT—all of which receive Koch funding—that the foundation has not infringed on their research or academic integrity in any way. Exploring a source of funding should not be construed as an endorsement of the politics of the Koch brothers." —Religion News Service