

# Staff member reaches \$50,000 settlement with Columbia following termination

The staff member was allegedly terminated for her participation in the April 18 “Gaza Solidarity Encampment.”



By [Audrea Chen](#) / Columbia Daily Spectator

Clara C. told Spectator she plans to donate \$25,000 from her settlement “directly to the movement for Palestine.”

BY [MAYA STAHL](#) • OCTOBER 10, 2024 AT 8:23 PM

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Clara C.—a former administrative assistant in a Columbia language department and union member of United Auto Workers Local 2110 who requested partial anonymity due to fear of retaliation from future employers—reached a \$50,000 settlement with

The settlement was reached “amicably” under the condition that she is “ineligible for rehire” at Columbia, according to the memorandum of agreement between her and the University, a copy of which was obtained by Spectator. Clara C. is one of at least four “retaliatory firings” of Columbia and Barnard staff members for participating in pro-Palestinian protests on campus, according to a [petition](#) signed by over 300 community members, unions, and organizations published on Sept. 26.

Clara C. said she participated in the “Gaza Solidarity Encampment” on April 18 while on her lunch break, during which she was arrested after former University President Minouche Shafik [authorized](#) the New York Police Department to sweep the encampment. Following her arrest, she was unable to return to work and was soon after “suspended pending investigation,” according to a May 2 letter from UAW Local 2110 to the University.

Clara C. was terminated from her position on May 10 “due to the serious misconduct that occurred on April 18, 2024,” according to her termination notice obtained by Spectator. Following her termination, UAW Union 2110 filed a grievance alleging that the University violated the union’s collective bargaining agreement. Her grievance meeting, held on June 5, found the University “did not violate the Collective Bargaining Agreement by terminating the employment,” according to the letter sent following the meeting by Columbia’s executive director of labor and employee relations and grievance hearing officer to UAW Local 2110.

“However, contrary to the Union’s belief, [Clara C.] was not terminated because of the arrest; instead, she was terminated due to her decision to enter and remain in the encampment on April 18. As such, [Clara C.’s] termination was for just cause under the CBA,” the letter reads.

Clara C.’s arbitration meeting—a formal hearing of a grievance by an independent third party—was scheduled for Oct. 2. The day before, she said that the University offered her a \$10,000 settlement to “not go through with” the arbitration. She said that she “decided not to respond” to the offer, which expired when her arbitration began.

During her arbitration, the University presented at least three national news articles about Jewish student safety as grounds for her termination, according to photos of the articles presented at the arbitration and reviewed by Spectator. The articles

Spring semester as evidence for her termination.

“[Columbia’s] evidence was claims of the fear created on campus for Jewish students by pro-Palestinian protests, and certainly this was meant to be a scare tactic, to try to show that they would paint me and the cause as harmful, and thus firing me for being arrested as justified,” Clara C. said.

She said that the University first offered \$40,000 during her arbitration, but her lawyer countered with \$50,000 and the agreement that her termination “will be converted to a resignation,” according to the memorandum of the agreement. The University accepted this counteroffer. Clara C. said her \$50,000 settlement represents one year’s worth of pay.

“My lawyer came back from this meeting and said, ‘We’ve never seen a number like this from Columbia,’” Clara C. said. “‘Columbia does not give numbers like this.’”

A University spokesperson declined to comment on the arbitration.

Clara C. “acknowledges that she was fully and fairly represented by Local 2110 UAW in the disposition of this agreement,” according to her memorandum of agreement reviewed by Spectator. But despite her win, Clara C. said that the union still failed “to protect [staff] against repression” throughout the past year and failed to offer “workers any sort of guidance about how to protect themselves” from disciplinary action for protest.

“The Union categorically refutes the assertion that we failed to protect our members or advise them on guidelines,” Olga Brudastova, president of Local 2110 UAW, wrote in a statement to Spectator. “On the contrary, we circulated a legal advice memorandum to all staff represented by Local 2110 and we defended the staff member vigorously, filing a grievance and taking the grievance to arbitration, when she was discharged. The settlement that was reached was negotiated by the Union on her behalf and she was fully and fairly represented.”

Some unions have filed charges against the University in an attempt to protect their workers. The Student Workers of Columbia-United Auto Workers and the Columbia University Residents Advisors Collective [filed unfair labor practice charges](#) to the National Labor Relations Board on July 8. The unions alleged the University

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“I think what is true is Columbia went out of their way to violate my rights as a worker in order to repress support for Palestine,” Clara C. said. “They were so foolish and reckless about it that they had no choice but to face up to that fact when an arbitrator was going to sit down and hear what really happened.”

Clara C. said that she plans to donate \$25,000 from her settlement “directly to the movement for Palestine,” and “to support other workers and students facing repression or speaking out against genocide.”

“It was a no-brainer, like the need for Palestinians to be able to evacuate now, the need for fired and suspended and evicted students, not only at Columbia, across the city, across the country, to have mutual aid is necessary,” Clara C. said.

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