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Brad Hoylman-Sigal, Borough President

April 15, 2026

Ms. Claire Shipman
Acting President
Columbia University
535 W 116th St.
New York, NY 10027

Dear Acting President Shipman:

I write to you as Manhattan Borough President on behalf of the residents of Morningside Heights, who have now waited more than two years for returned access to College Walk. I urge Columbia University to reopen the Morningside campus gates without further delay.

College Walk, the 116th Street passageway, has long served as a gathering space and source of civic pride for the people of Morningside Heights. In 1953, it was formalized as a public corridor through an agreement with the City of New York, one the city's own commission described as being "[in the public interest](#)." As recently as 2021, Columbia's alumni magazine described it as a "[tree-lined public walkway](#)." Even the gates themselves, when installed in 1967, were met with assurances that the campus would remain "[officially open to outsiders](#)." The University's current posture is difficult to square with that history.

I understand that the decision to restrict access arose from genuine security concerns, and I do not question the University's obligation to keep its students and faculty safe. But the case for maintaining these restrictions has not held up -- the disruptions that prompted the closure were and continue to be driven primarily by students who hold Columbia IDs; locking out the surrounding community does not address the actual source of disruption. The guest pass program Columbia has offered as an alternative is not a substitute for open access: it excludes local employees and visitors, is geographically restricted, and places the burden of navigating an unfamiliar technology on residents, many of whom are elderly, who should never have lost access in the first place. Students, faculty, community organizations, and elected officials have

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consistently and respectfully called for a return to openness, including in a [January 15, 2025 letter](#) from my colleague Councilmember Shaun Abreu and members of Community Board 9. In fact, the University's own [February 2025 senate survey](#) found that 62% of nearly 13,000 student respondents would feel “very comfortable” with the campus reopened.

I would be remiss not to note that the closure also raises serious legal questions, including the University's obligations under the 1953 public-use agreement and under the Americans with Disabilities Act, given the significant detour the closure imposes on elderly and disabled residents. A [class-action lawsuit](#) filed in January 2025 by longtime Morningside Heights residents notes this directly. I am confident that Columbia shares my interest in resolving these concerns expeditiously.

There is a workable path forward. Columbia can reopen College Walk while establishing clear, enforceable rules of conduct for all, students and public alike, with designated areas for peaceful demonstration and coordination with Community Board 9, elected officials, and community stakeholders. Security and openness are not mutually exclusive.

I respectfully request a meeting with Columbia University leadership, local elected officials, the Morningside Heights Community Coalition, and other community representatives to discuss this matter. Columbia's strength has always been rooted in its relationship with this city. I trust your leadership is ready to restore it.

Sincerely yours,


Brad Hoylman-Sigal
Manhattan Borough President