To: Scott L. Bok, Chair of the University of Pennsylvania Board of Trustees  
Cc: Medha Narvekar, Secretary of the University of Pennsylvania  

February 16th, 2023  

The presidents of the Graduate and Professional Student Assembly (GAPSA) and the graduate school student governments (“the G12”) are writing to call for the University of Pennsylvania Board of Trustees to promptly consider GAPSA's resolution pertaining to student representation on Penn’s Board of Trustees.  

GAPSA, the G12, and the graduate affinity organizations represent graduate student voices on campus, and believe it is in our student constituents’ interests to call for voting representation on Penn's Board of Trustees.  

Penn’s Board of Trustees is the highest governing body of the University of Pennsylvania, and is the central decision-maker of many issues that directly affect students. These decisions include the selection of the University President, tuition and other student charges and financial aid for the academic year, administration appointments (particularly the appointment and reappointment of school Deans), authorization of new leases, acquisition and development of land, facility renovations and expansions, new constructions, approval of other classes of trustees, establishing of new academic programs, adoption of new University policies and procedures, setting spending rules for endowments, capital plans, and amendments to the Statutes of Trustees.  

Although students have had “observer status” on some of Penn’s “Trustee Committees”, these committees frequently do not allow for the full participation of students, and do not have final decision-making authority on many of the issues that directly pertain to students. Only with voting representation on the Board will student voices be fully considered in University decision-making.  

The proposed student trustees would provide a vital perspective on issues before the Board, informed by their experience as students and their knowledge of the needs, concerns, and interests of the current generation of Penn undergraduate and graduate students on important University matters. Student trustees’ input and votes on student- and campus-facing topics and more would provide an additional voice and opportunity to spark new ideas that would further the important work that the Trustees do to support the mission and values of the University of Pennsylvania.  

Student representation would provide the institution an additional layer of legitimacy, given that many of the Board's actions impact students’ day-to-day lives, and would empower the Trustees to live up to their credo of making fully informed decisions in the best interests of the University’s constituencies and of society.
Penn would join a plethora of universities in celebrating the addition of student voices on the Board of Trustees. Student trustees would bring the University of Pennsylvania in line with peer institutions. Several universities in the United States have implemented student trustee positions on their Boards, including Cornell University, Duke University, and the University of California System; the inclusion of student trustees at these institutions has been shown to provide a valuable student perspective on decision-making processes and to increase student engagement and involvement in the governance of the University.

GAPSA has outlined a preferred model of representation in its recent resolution to establish student trustee seats. While graduate student leadership recognizes that trustees have ultimate authority to determine what precise model of representation students might have on the Board of Trustees, the central call of the resolution remains the same: students should have representation on the Board.

Graduate student leadership has deeply appreciated the many opportunities we have been given to have our voices heard in Penn's governance. It is because of these opportunities that we are able to advocate for issues of great importance to our student constituents. One of these efforts is the continued expansion of student voices in all aspects of the University’s governance. We believe that Penn is a community where all of its members can learn from each others’ lived experiences. As such, we, the respective presidents of graduate student government, affirm our call for direct student representation on the University of Pennsylvania’s Board of Trustees.

Signed Collectively,

Robert Blake Watson, Graduate and Professional Student Assembly (GAPSA) President
Dawn Scholastica Adrian, Graduate School of Education Student Government President ‘22-23
Israel J. Harding, School of Social Policy and Practice Student Government President ‘22-23
John D. Shin, Penn Dental Medicine Executive Student Council President ‘22-23
Nandan Tunnu, Graduate Student Engineering Government President ‘22-23
Kathy Sliwinski, Nursing Doctoral Student Organization Board Chair ‘22-23
Sarah E. Hegarty, Biomedical Graduate Student Association Chair ‘22-23
Michael Krone, Penn Carey Law Student Government President ‘22-23
Sathya Vijayakumar, Wharton Doctoral Council Co-President ‘22-23
Arianna Chang, Wharton Graduate Association President ‘22-23
Micah Epstein, Weitzman Student Council Co-President ‘21-23
Elizabeth M. Bruzinski, Penn Vet SAVMA President ‘22-23
Emma Jesch, Annenberg Graduate Council Chair Spring ‘23
Nakisha Renee Jones, LPSGov President ‘21-23
Maria Kovalchuk, SASgov President ‘22-23