Resolution 16: Demanding Cornell fight for fair terms for the remote services its community is required to use

Abstract: Because of the coronavirus pandemic, students and instructors are required to use tools like Zoom and CASHNet. Despite privacy and security risks, both services mandate that users waive their right to sue in court or as part of a class action. Cornell must contact third-party vendors and fight to ensure their terms do not strip these essential legal rights. If Cornell cannot negotiate the removal of unfair terms from a service, it must commit to provide legal support for anyone harmed by use of that service.

Sponsored by: Jaron Kent-Dobias

Whereas, in Resolution 3 of the 2019–2020 term the GPSA recognized the harmful nature of user terms that mandate arbitration and ban class action in disputes with third-party vendors, and in particular the Bursar’s CASHNet service for bill pay.

Whereas, the president declined to act on that resolution and highlighted the alternative payment options available for Cornell community members who do not want to agree to those terms.

Whereas, with the onset of the coronavirus pandemic the Bursar has suspended in-person payment and they “strongly encourage paying your bill online via CASHNet,” with only wire transfers and check payments by mail as alternatives.

Whereas, while the president’s response noted that “many vendors are unwilling to create special terms and conditions in exchange for providing a targeted service,” the president told the GPSA that Cornell made no attempt to contact CASHNet and have those terms changed.

Whereas, on 10 March 2020 Cornell announced a move to virtual instruction starting 6 April 2020, explicitly mentioning the Zoom virtual meeting service as a principle remote access technology.

Whereas, Zoom is the University’s only synchronous remote instruction tool, making its use by students and instructors implicitly required where it is not explicitly required.

Whereas, item twenty of Zoom’s terms mandates arbitration and ban class action.

Whereas, these terms are especially troubling given Zoom’s access to the audio and video recording functions on personal devices and its history of privacy and security problems so severe, that some organizations are banning its use.
Whereas, the required use of Zoom by students and instructors poses them a significant privacy and security risk while stripping them of meaningful legal recourse if Zoom’s purposeful or negligent actions lead to their harm.

Be it therefore resolved, Cornell must use its influence as an institutional customer to actually contact third-party services like CASHNet and Zoom and request fair terms for its community.

Be it further resolved, Cornell must commit to fund the legal challenges of any community member harmed by their required use of third party services that ban legal recourse through public courts or class action.

Respectfully Submitted,

Jaron Kent-Dobias
Chair of the Student Advocacy Committee

3. https://www.dfa.cornell.edu/bursar/students-parents/paying-your-bill
4. https://assembly.cornell.edu/meetings/cornell-university-graduate-and-professional-student-assembly-meeting-03022020-0530pm
6. https://teaching.cornell.edu/teaching-resources/planning-remote-teaching
7. “Agreement to Arbitrate; Waiver of Class Action. If You are located in the United States, You agree to resolve disputes only on an individual basis, through arbitration pursuant to the provisions of Exhibit B. The parties expressly waive any right to bring any action, lawsuit, or proceeding as a class or collective action, private attorney general action, or any other proceeding in which any party acts or proposes to act in a representative capacity.” — https://zoom.us/terms/ (emphasis original)
8. One Zoom vulnerability patched in July 2020 “could force Mac users that have (or ever had) Zoom installed on their device to join Zoom meetings with their cameras automatically activated.” — https://www.vox.com/recode/2020/3/31/21201019/zoom-coronavirus-privacy-hacks
9. On April 1, 2020, “another security researcher found two new bugs that can be used to take over a Zoom user’s Mac, including tapping into the webcam and microphone.” — https://techcrunch.com/2020/04/01/zoom-doom/amp/
10. New York City has banned public schools from using Zoom after they “received reports of issues that impact the security and privacy of the platform during the credentialing process.” — https://chalkbeat.org/posts/ny/2020/04/04/nyc-forbids-schools-from-using-zoom-for-remote-learning-after-privacy-concerns-emerge/
11. “SpaceX has banned its employees from using video-conferencing app Zoom, citing "significant privacy and security concerns."
12. An anticipated response to this point is that Cornell’s self-hosting of Zoom conferencing relays mitigates the privacy concerns special to Zoom’s own relays. In actuality this only mitigates some of those privacy concerns—since “user
and meeting metadata [including the encryption keys used to protect video and audio!] are still managed in the Zoom public cloud”—and mitigates none of the security concerns, which are mostly to do with the Zoom desktop and mobile applications.—https://support.zoom.us/hc/en-us/articles/360034064852-Zoom-On-Premise-Deployment