

To whom it may concern (Office of Residential Living, Georgetown University Hotel and Conference Center, GUPD),

Description of the Problem

- In the span of 7 hours, residents, staff, and visitors of the Georgetown University Hotel and Conference Center and the Leavey Student Center experienced **two, unannounced rounds of fire alarms**. Both rounds of alarms lasted at least 30 minutes: the first round occurred on September 21st, from about 9:30pm to some time after 10pm; the second round occurred on September 22nd, from about 4:11am-8am*.
- With no prior notice, little to no direction or communication from authorities or staff, residents and visitors alike exited the Hotel during the first round of fire alarms and stood outside until instructed to go back inside. During the second round, residents sought and received notice that the alarm was false.
- According to residents of the Hotel, these pair of fire alarm events are just two of several disruptive, poorly managed fire alarm events since the beginning of the Semester (August 25th). For obvious reasons (which will still be detailed below), these events are unacceptable.
- The following issues are the result of these incredibly disruptive false fire alarm events
 - *Disruption:*
 - Students: Students are expected to be academically excellent, involved in extracurriculars, and attend to other responsibilities on behalf of themselves and the University community. These alarms necessitate student attention every time they sound off; students either must leave the Hotel in the middle of work and/or sleep, or they must deal with the blaring sirens of a false alarm as they attempt to rest
 - Staff: Besides already working long hours (including at night), Staff must contend with the administrative and logistical issues of reaching students, communicating with the GUPD, and responding to a possible legitimate fire threat. While these are their responsibilities, frequently dealing with false alarms creates an uneasy work environment not conducive for the well-being of staff.
 - GUPD: as the main law enforcement mechanism on-campus, GUPD is expected to address/investigate all fire alarms, whether or not they are false. Given the vast array of safety responsibilities under GUPD's purview, these false fire alarm events are diverting key personnel resources for a relatively uninvestigated issue.
 - *Reduced safety:*
 - As some students have casually discussed, the frequency and seeming randomness of these fire alarm events decreases the likelihood of taking a **real** fire alarm seriously. Fire alarms should not be mundane, routine, or

normalized. If these events continue to occur as frequently as they do, students, staff, and GUPD alike risk **collective desensitization**, reducing our community's capacity to respond appropriately to fire in the future.

○ *Publicity*

- GU Hotel and Conference Center: The problem of frequent and unannounced fire alarms is a clear turn off for future potential residents of the Hotel. When non-student residents are permitted to purchase rooms at the hotel in the future, they will be less likely to spend their hard-earned money at a place that can't guarantee senseless interruptions.
- Georgetown University: with a constant stream of on-campus issues (from a potential salmonella outbreak to an uninvestigated [intruder incident at New South](#)), the administration admittedly has a lot to contend with. Certainly, there are no quick answers to these issues. However, as the college admissions process for undergraduates ramps up, student stories of an opaque response to false fire alarms and other issues has the potential to deter untold numbers of potential students. This deterrence not only diminishes Georgetown's reputation as a world class institution, but it also means a possible reduction in tuition revenue for the university. After the budget cuts caused by the pandemic, the last thing Georgetown needs is a further reduction in revenue.

Testimonies of Residents

“Besides sheer annoyance, these alarm incidents have disrupted my health, focus, and work output. Being forced to wake up at four in the morning because of a false alarm is frankly a terrible way to start the day; the confusion, the grating sounds, the opaqueness of authorities have all severely reduced my confidence in Georgetown's incident response and relative satisfaction with my housing situation.” - *Akil Cole, COL '24*

"These alarm incidents create more issues than mere inconvenience: when evacuating, Hotel residents risk running into close contact with people who have active COVID-19 infections living on the 2nd floor who, per instructions, evacuate onto the Leavey Esplanade and across the bridge- the same place non-isolated Hotel residents are meant to go in an emergency per the emergency exit plan. Being able to communicate any false alarms or tests more quickly will help eliminate associated risks with exposure to COVID-19 as we wait near our residences, with uninfected residents unsure as to who does and does not have COVID-19 on top of the stress from having to evacuate. In addition, students becoming desensitized is becoming more and more of an issue. We hope that communication can be made more clear for these incidents in order to better protect our community and ensure that, if a real emergency comes, we will all act appropriately and without hesitation."- *Justin Dean English, COL '24*

“This is probably the 7th or 8th time the fire alarms have gone off without there being a fire in the past 2 weeks and I feel this puts all of us in danger as many of us do not take the fire alarms seriously anymore. We were woken up multiple times in the middle of the night and on top of this, no one could figure out how to turn them off for over an hour each time they went off. There seems to be a lack of care for the wellbeing of the hotel students.” - *Andrew Bergeron, MSB '24*

Calls to Action

As a result of the above-mentioned problems, the student residents of the Georgetown University Hotel urge the following actions be taken:

- *By the Office of Residential Living*
 - Release of a substantive report detailing the past, current, or planned responses to the fire alarm incidents in the Georgetown University Hotel and other residential communities, including but not limited to the following information
 - When was the first complaint regarding fire alarms issued to the Office of Residential Living?
 - Was this an issue in previous school years? If so, how was it managed? If it was not an issue in the past, why is it an issue now?
 - Who (i.e. which authorities, university personnel, local government officials) should we as students refer to in case this fire alarm issue persists?
 - What is the nature of the relationship between the Office of Residential Living and the Georgetown University Hotel this semester? How are these two entities working collaboratively, if at all?
 - Why was the Hotel only assigned a single Residential Assistant, despite having about 80 residents?
- *By Georgetown University Hotel and Conference Center*
 - Creation of clear communication protocol between students and hotel staff in the event of other fire alarm related issues.
 - Currently, there is no succinct way for the front desk to communicate to students whether or not a fire alarm issue is real or false. All non-quarantined residents live on the 4th and 5th floors of the Hotel. As was the case on September 21st and 22nd, dozens of students needed to descend 2-4+ flights of stairs for a false alarm. This was not only a waste of time, but we also experienced shaky and conflicting "all-clear" notices at times- which were communicated either by asking directly at the front desk or through trusting someone's word in the Hotel Residents' GroupMe rather than any effective and authoritative mass-response. GUPD officers and workers at the front desk also seemed to be operating on different

- policies regarding what constitutes an "all-clear" during these incidents, only further adding to the confusion.
- Possible avenues for this protocol could include the front desk having access to a university-wide fire alarm code that connects to residents' in-room phones or the assignment of a student fire alarm representative(s) (including someone who isn't the Residential Assistant to better ensure a quick response to an event when one happens). Possibilities for the protocol are open, but action needs to take place.
 - Release of a statement explaining, with the best available knowledge, what is causing the fire alarm incidents. The lack of transparency from the hotel has encouraged confusion and distrust with the student community. We want to know, **at the very least**,
 - Potential causes for the fire alarm incidents
 - The nature of the relationship between the front desk and the fire alarm technician
 - The existing communication protocol between GU Hotel, GUPD, and any other relevant authorities in case of fire alarm incidents.
 - How to anonymously report and follow-up on reports of smoking and other violations of fire-alerting activities
 - *By Georgetown University Police Department*
 - Investigation into the cause of the fire alarm incidents, or a public statement explaining the existence of such an investigation. Currently, the relationship between GUPD and the GU Hotel is unclear to student residents. We have the following questions:
 - Is it reasonable to expect GUPD to conduct the above-mentioned investigation? If so, on what time table? If not, should we issue this request to local authorities instead?
 - What is the scope of GUPD in incidents like this? What existing steps does GUPD take in response to fire alarm incidents, and how can they be adjusted to protect students and prioritize efficient resource use?
 - In the case of a genuine fire emergency, what steps can students expect GUPD to take to reduce harm?

Signatures: Name, School and Year, Residence (optional)

1. Akil Cole, COL '24, GU Hotel
2. Andrew Bergeron, MSB '24, GU Hotel
3. Justin English, COL '24, GU Hotel
4. Francesca Theofilou, NHS '24
5. Jacob Begich, MSB '24
6. Shevani Tewari, SFS '24

7. Arjun Badami, COL '24
8. Elle Smith, COL'24
9. Mark Kuo, COL '24
10. Nirvana Khan, SFS '24 (GUSA Senator)
11. Juan Connelly, MSB '24
12. Brandon Wu, SFS '24
13. Andrew Arnold, SFS '24
14. Claire Cheng, SFS '24, GU Hotel
15. *Naomi Eluojierior NHS '23 GU Hotel*
16. *Sam Li, SFS '24*
17. *Andrew Oliver, 24'*
18. *Manahal Fazal, SFS '24*
19. *Aidan Hsieh COL '24*
20. *Ian Tracy COL'24*
21. *Owen POsnett COL '24*
22. *Chloe Schneider COL '24 GU Hotel*
23. *Sara Fairbank NHS '24*
24. *Dominic Gordon SFS 24, GUSA Senator*
25. *Olivia Henry COL '24*

*Alarms in the Leavey center stopped at about 5:05am, but alarms in the Hotel continued on and off (mostly on) through 8am on September 22nd