



## U.E. Local 896 Campaign to Organize Graduate Students



*The elected leadership of COGS (the Campaign to Organize Graduate Students) calls on the Johnson County Board of Supervisors (BoS) to engage with concerns about their research study and respect the knowledge and work of graduate workers.*

In 2025, Johnson County Supervisors paid the Center for Social Science Innovation \$53,406 for a study to assess county residents' feelings on a new Sheriff's Office and Jail.<sup>1</sup> When community members, including graduate workers, raised concerns with the methodology and interpretations of their results, they were met with dismissal and silence. Several Supervisors continued to describe the findings of the study as showing "overwhelming" support for the new jail.<sup>2</sup> With the exception of Supervisors Fixmer-Oraiz and Remington, the Board of Supervisors has expressed no real willingness to discuss these concerns and their potential policy implications.

As the leadership of the labor union for graduate workers at the University of Iowa, we view the recent actions of the Johnson County Board of Supervisors as blatant disregard and disrespect for an open, rigorous research progress. High level research has real world policy applications and needs to be an important part of how we make decisions. But as graduate researchers, we know research must also be open to rigorous review and questions about its interpretations.

In dismissing the concerns of graduate workers, researchers, and community members, the Board of Supervisors is fitting into a national and state-wide pattern of disregard for established scientific standards and practices. A particularly egregious example of this disregard came when, at a Board of Supervisors meeting held on May 6th, an experienced graduate researcher made a public comment voicing concerns about this study.

Instead of engaging with the critique, Supervisor Rod Sullivan took time during a later discussion on the project's bond referendum language to single out and discredit this particular PhD graduate worker's very real concerns. He expressed that these concerns were brought up "randomly," likening the researcher's criticism to HHS Secretary RFK Jr.'s anti-vaccine politics. In doing so, he attempted to paint critique of a single survey instrument as categorically equivalent to rejection of decades of public-health consensus. Conflating legitimate methodological questions with fringe ideological statements reinforces a harmful broader pattern of distrust of scientific research.

We wholly disapprove of Mr. Sullivan's behavior and treatment of this commenter. We fully support the researchers and workers who rightfully demand transparency and accuracy from the Board of Supervisors and the projects the Board pursues.

---

<sup>1</sup> [https://www.johnsoncountyiowa.gov/sites/default/files/2025-12/CSSI%20IOWA\\_Final%20Report\\_CJCC%20Survey%20and%20Focus%20Groups.pdf](https://www.johnsoncountyiowa.gov/sites/default/files/2025-12/CSSI%20IOWA_Final%20Report_CJCC%20Survey%20and%20Focus%20Groups.pdf); [https://www.thegazette.com/news/local/more-than-74-of-johnson-county-residents-support-a-new-jail-survey-finds/article\\_ef9dba90-9873-5835-8936-44e5df2d5e24.html](https://www.thegazette.com/news/local/more-than-74-of-johnson-county-residents-support-a-new-jail-survey-finds/article_ef9dba90-9873-5835-8936-44e5df2d5e24.html)

<sup>2</sup> <https://rodsullivan.blogspot.com/2025/09/>; <https://www.press-citizen.com/story/opinion/columnists/2026/04/23/voters-need-to-know-candidate-stances-on-a-new-jail-guest-column/89758194007/>; [https://www.thegazette.com/opinion/letters-to-the-editor/jon-green-is-leading-work-on-a-johnson-county-jail-proposal/article\\_071a1dbc-620c-491d-a6d9-f329beeb8a45.html](https://www.thegazette.com/opinion/letters-to-the-editor/jon-green-is-leading-work-on-a-johnson-county-jail-proposal/article_071a1dbc-620c-491d-a6d9-f329beeb8a45.html).

Rigorous research matters. Graduate workers' knowledge and expertise matters. The Johnson County Board of Supervisors have not demonstrated that they understand this.

We call on the Board of Supervisors, including Mr. Sullivan, to engage with this critique and have a proper conversation with the concerned community members and researchers who have offered their expertise on the matter.