October 23, 2020

Below is the report of the Alumni Association Award for Distinguished Achievement Special Committee (the “Special Committee”) of the Horace Mann Alumni Council (the “Alumni Council”) to the Horace Mann School community regarding our review of the petition (the “Petition”) to reconsider the Award for Distinguished Achievement (the “Award”) which was bestowed in 2011 upon then-former United States Attorney General William Barr ‘67.

When media coverage aired of protestors being forcefully cleared from Lafayette Park by law enforcement, many people, both inside and outside of the Horace Mann community, were deeply troubled and outraged. Horace Mann School’s core values include mutual respect, mature behavior, and a caring community. Horace Mann School’s mission statement places importance on preparing “a diverse community of students to lead great and giving lives.” These are values which we are proud to uphold as a community.

We understand the gravity of the situation which precipitated this Petition request from our fellow members of the Horace Mann community. Underlying this conversation are several very important concerns, which we share, concerning a multitude of vital and serious issues facing not only the Horace Mann community but also the entire country: about freedom of speech and the right to protest, about racism, about violence, about fairness, about privilege, about the role of law enforcement across the country, and about how to create meaningful change and leave the world a better place than we collectively found it. Especially at this moment in our nation’s history, what happened in Lafayette Park is an issue of great concern to us and, in our view, rightfully has the public’s attention.

The Special Committee believes that the right to assemble peacefully in protest is a sacrosanct right guaranteed by the U.S. Constitution. Furthermore, the Special Committee feels strongly that any use of violent force against peaceful protesters is repugnant to this right as well as incompatible with Horace Mann School’s core values. The images and news reporting of the events that took place in Lafayette Park on June 1, 2020 were deeply troubling, and the Special Committee believes that the Horace Mann School community stands with us in calling on all government officials (HM alumni/ae and non-alumni/ae alike) to uphold the inviolable constitutional “right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.”

1 United States Constitution, 1st Amendment.
The Special Committee believes equally important and reflective of Horace Mann School’s values is making sure that any process to reconsider a prior award bestowed upon a member of our community is completed in a thoughtful, thorough, and unbiased manner. The Special Committee’s goal in reviewing the Petition’s request was to utilize a process which it believed to be fair, thorough, methodical and replicable. We sought to ensure that we had considered all the information available to us and acknowledged any information that we may have lacked. We also sought to put our own personal political views aside in our analysis of the request underlying the Petition.

As described in more detail in this report, the Special Committee’s process necessarily included a comprehensive review of both the facts in question and the nature of the Award. As we reviewed the publicly available information about and the reporting on the profoundly upsetting events that took place in Lafayette Park, we observed contested reports as to precisely how these events unfolded, as well as contested reports over the nature and extent of the involvement in such events by Attorney General Barr. Ultimately, for the reasons discussed below, we determined that we would not recommend revoking the Award bestowed on then-former Attorney General Barr in 2011. We do, however, acknowledge the significant number of members of the Horace Mann community that signed the Petition, which spurred the Alumni Council to take action in forming the Special Committee and issuing this report.

This report was drafted by the members of the Special Committee and accepted by vote of the Alumni Council. In this report, we share our process and our findings across the range of factors that led us to this conclusion.

The Award

Since 1939, the Alumni Council has presented the Award annually (with the exception of years with extenuating circumstances) to a Horace Mann School graduate whose achievement, in the judgment of the Alumni Council, has particularly distinguished the individual in his or her chosen profession. The primary criterion for the Award over at least the last 20 years has been “demonstrated sustained excellence in a field.” While many in our community have referred to this Award as a “Distinguished Alumni Award,” the Award is actually an “Award for Distinguished Achievement,” given to an honoree for a particular professional achievement. Prior award recipients have included Pulitzer Prize winners, artists, poets, scientists, entertainers, and judges, among other esteemed professionals.

Then-former Attorney General Barr was selected to received the Award in 2011, after the Distinguished Achievement Award Committee researched his professional accomplishments, along with those of other candidates. Attorney General Barr’s extensive record of public service, including his term as United States Attorney General under President George H.W. Bush, was the primary basis for the DAA Committee’s decision, at that time, to select him as the recipient of the Award. Notably, Attorney General Barr was confirmed by the Senate, both before and after he received the Award:
in 1991, by a voice vote, and in 2019 by a bipartisan majority of 54 to 45, with three Democrats voting to confirm and one Republican voting against confirmation.

The Petition

The Petition was created by Jessica Rosberger ‘20 and Kiara Royer ‘20 and posted to change.org on June 4, 2020. The Petition stated that:

[O]n June 2nd, Barr ordered law enforcement to beat, spray tear-gas on, and forcibly clear a crowd of peaceful protesters, who were exercising their first amendment rights in Lafayette Park, so that the President could appear in a photo opportunity.

The Petition further stated that:

[T]his was a callous and despicable act demonstrating a clear disregard for our democratic values of free speech and racial justice. In addition, Barr violated our school’s Core Values of Mutual Respect and Mature Behavior as well as our Mission Statement by infringing on the common good. William Barr should not be held as a model member of our community because of his disgraceful actions.

The Petition requested that “the school administration rethink his status as a Distinguished Alumnus Award winner.”

As of September 7, 2020, the Petition had 8,805 signatures, approximately 20% of which appeared to come from within the Horace Mann community, with the rest appearing to come from members of the general public. We discuss the number of signatures representing the Horace Mann community in more detail below.

The Special Committee: formation, charge, and topics of inquiry

The Alumni Council is independent and distinct from Horace Mann School. The Alumni Council is comprised of a group of volunteers across a wide range of graduating years, who care deeply about the School and its community. The Alumni Council exists to help and support Horace Mann School and hosts a wide range of annual activities, mostly focused on increasing alumni engagement and fundraising for student programs. Among the Alumni Council’s responsibilities is the selection of Award honorees and the presentation of the Award.

On June 6th, shortly after the Petition was posted, the voting members of the Alumni Council convened to discuss the Petition and the serious issues it raised. During this meeting, a number of members expressed their own outrage over the use of force against protestors in Lafayette Park and communicated deep concern regarding the nature of what had been widely reported regarding Attorney General Barr’s involvement in those events. Members also discussed what appeared to be a significant level of engagement
with the Petition from the Horace Mann community and determined that further consideration of the Petition was warranted. Members raised a number of issues to examine in connection with any process to reconsider the Award, including the appropriate standard to be applied for any potential action (including revocation), how best to design a fair and objective process that would be replicable and independent from respective members’ individual political views, and how the specific facts on which a decision would be based could best be determined. The Alumni Council formed the Special Committee to examine these and other issues and determined that the Special Committee would report back to the Alumni Council with a recommendation regarding the Petition request. The Special Committee is comprised of voting members of the Alumni Council who volunteered to consider the request of the Petition. All members who volunteered were included on the Special Committee.

The Special Committee met approximately every week to review and debate topics raised by the Petition and related questions. Ahead of meetings, individual members of the Special Committee were assigned specific topics to research independently, and they then shared their findings with the Special Committee in order to foster a thoughtful and informed discussion. Each meeting of the Special Committee was held pursuant to an agreed-upon agenda, and each participant was afforded the opportunity to share all of his or her respective views on a given topic with extensive discussion and debate following thereafter. We met with the alumnae who created the Petition to learn more about their perspectives. We also reached out to Attorney General Barr through the e-mail address listed in his alumni record but have not received a response at the time of this report.

In evaluating the request underlying the Petition, the Special Committee considered the following topics:

1) Community Feedback: What are the concerns and perspectives being voiced by the community through email, phone calls, and social media?
2) Revocation and Precedent: Should the Award, which was granted at a certain point in time, based on a certain set of information, be open for reconsideration at a later date based on a new set of information? Under what circumstances, if any, should the Alumni Council revoke the Award? Can we learn from best practices of other institutions which have evaluated similar requests?
3) Facts Surrounding the Incidents at Lafayette Park: What do we know? What do we not know?
4) Award Criteria: Do the criteria accurately reflect the community’s values? Should the criteria be updated?

Community Feedback

The Petition attracted notable support from within the Horace Mann community. Of the signatories to the Petition, 1,751 (as of July 1, 2020), or approximately 20% of Petition signatures, appear to be from members of the Horace Mann community. This includes approximately 1,233 alumni, including alumni from the most recent class of 2020. Based on the significant cohort of alumni who signed the Petition, we recognize that many of our fellow alumni feel that both Attorney General Barr and the Trump administration in
which he serves have acted in a way that is contrary to values instilled at Horace Mann School. We reviewed feedback from Petition comments and social media comments as well as direct emails and phone calls to the Horace Mann Alumni Office and to the Special Committee. This feedback reflected a wide range of viewpoints, with a sizeable majority voicing their support for the tone of the Petition. Reasons given in favor of revoking the Award included the beliefs that (i) Attorney General Barr had abused his power, (ii) his actions concerning and beyond the events at Lafayette Park were anti-democratic, and (iii) general anger toward the Trump administration, including Attorney General Barr. There were also other comments from supporters of the Petition that were not directly related to the Petition’s subject matter, such as comments expressing sentiments about Horace Mann School generally. A number of Horace Mann community members also expressed their views against revocation of the Award. Reasons given against revoking the Award included the beliefs that (i) the Petition reflected a partisan perspective and that Horace Mann School and the Alumni Council (including the selection of Award honorees) should not be politicized; (ii) Attorney General Barr, by virtue of having twice held the position of Attorney General of the United States, is very distinguished; and (iii) one instance of revocation of the Award, especially in a charged political climate, would be likely to lead to a slippery slope where other recipients of the Award would have to be reevaluated based on subjective criteria.

Revocation and Precedent

We are not aware of the topic of award revocation having previously arisen in the history of the Award. The Special Committee extensively debated whether the Alumni Council should ever revoke an award.

Every Award for Distinguished Achievement has been granted to an honoree based on known achievements at a certain point in time. While the Alumni Council reviews, to the best of its ability, all known information about nominees at the time of their nomination, these nominees are often still active in their careers. There has always been an inherent risk that an Awardee’s future actions, whether in public or private life, could create cause for concern or that views and perception of a person’s accomplishments could shift over time. An Awardee who has a career or life in the public eye will especially be subject to these inevitable and wide-ranging public opinions about his or her work and life choices.

The process of reevaluating a previously given Award is complex. This process cannot be completed in isolation, but has potential implications beyond just one Award and one particular recipient. In the view of the Special Committee, in order to be fair and unbiased, the process of reevaluation must be based on comprehensive and objective information in a manner that can be replicated. Reevaluation of an Award and its recipient also raises questions about how different actions across different eras and environments translate into an understanding of a person’s achievements and character.

In the course of discussions about revocation, the Special Committee examined precedent from other institutions that have faced such requests in order to learn from best practices. We learned that awards or honorary degrees had more often been revoked in the rare
cases where criminal charges were brought against an honoree or following conviction of a crime.

The Special Committee also debated whether revocation of an Award is the appropriate way to reflect any community concerns about events that do not specifically relate to Horace Mann School. Ultimately, the Special Committee concluded that, in order for the Alumni Council to determine to revoke an Award, it would need to be confident that (i) all the relevant facts surrounding any events in question had been clearly established and there was a minimized possibility that key information would be reconsidered over the course of time due to changing perspectives, (ii) all community and stakeholder perspectives had been heard, and (iii) the process by which the Alumni Council came to a decision was one of the utmost care that could be fairly and consistently applied in any other similar situations, if necessary.

Facts

While neither the Alumni Council nor the Special Committee has the practical ability to conduct its own investigation into the occurrences at Lafayette Park, the Special Committee conducted an exhaustive review of media reports of the events at Lafayette Park. Ultimately, we believe that the key issues that bear on the questions posed by the Petition are: (i) were the protestors cleared from the park for legitimate law enforcement purposes or to facilitate a photo opportunity for the President?; (ii) were the methods of clearing the protestors proportional, legal, and justified?; and (iii) to what extent was Attorney General Barr involved in the relevant direction, oversight, and decision-making?

We noted the video coverage showing law enforcement officers using what were widely-perceived to be troubling levels of force against protestors at Lafayette Park. We noted the criticism from the general public and the media of Attorney General Barr’s perceived role in the incident at Lafayette Park.\(^2\) We noted that Attorney General Barr defended the conduct of law enforcement officers and his own conduct, and did not appear to express remorse or accept ultimate responsibility over the resulting treatment of protestors, as it appeared to many in the general public.\(^3\)

We also noted, however, that both Acting U.S. Park Police Chief Gregory Monahan and Attorney General Barr, in separate congressional hearings (each conducted under oath) denied that the decision to increase the perimeter around Lafayette Park was related to the President’s photo opportunity at St. John’s Episcopal Church on Monday, June 1.\(^4\) We noted that Acting Chief Monahan submitted a written statement to the House Natural Resources Committee stating that the Park Police and the Secret Service, neither of which report to Attorney General Barr, had decided, by late Saturday evening, May 30, to


\(^3\) *Face the Nation*, June 7, 2020, interview of Attorney General Barr by Margaret Brennan.

Sunday morning, May 31, to install additional fencing on the north side of the park. We noted that Attorney General Barr stated that he communicated the official order to increase the perimeter at approximately 2:00 p.m. on Monday, June 1, 2020, well in advance of the President’s photo opportunity later that day and that the operation was run by the Park Police. We further noted that Attorney General Barr had stated that he was not aware of the President’s intention to walk to the church at the time he gave the order to increase the perimeter, an assertion that has not, to our knowledge, been contradicted. Conflicting accounts exist as to the original source of the idea to stage a photo opportunity at the church, but we noted that Attorney General Barr has not been reported to have been involved in generating the idea or planning for it.

While many members of the Special Committee remain angered by the reports and footage from Lafayette Park in early June, given the disparate and still-contested accounts, the Special Committee concluded that it did not have access to enough undisputed information available to reach a fair conclusion as to Attorney General Barr’s role or his ultimate motivations in the incidents that occurred at Lafayette Park. We note that the DOJ Inspector General announced on July 23 that his office would investigate the law enforcement response to the protests in Washington, DC and Portland, Oregon. We hope such investigations will clarify the events surrounding the incident at Lafayette Park in a way that enables all citizens to draw their own conclusions with respect to these matters of national importance.

Conclusion as to the Award Presented to Attorney General Barr

The Petition raised many important debates and conversations about the values of our Horace Mann community and how they may be best defended and reflected. While we understand, and in many cases share, the strong reactions elicited by the events in Lafayette Park, after much deliberation, based on the analysis we have shared in this report, the Special Committee concluded that it could not support revocation of the Award granted to Attorney General Barr. These were long and difficult discussions, and our final decision was a challenging one. However, we are confident that we conducted a rigorous analysis of available information and that the process by which we reached this conclusion was fair, thorough, and replicable. On October 19, 2020, the Alumni Council voted to accept the conclusions of the Special Committee and to publish this report.

Award Criteria Review

While the impetus for the Petition may have been the actions in Lafayette Park, the impassioned debate that the Petition cultivated has highlighted a broader concern: that many members of the Horace Mann School community would like to see the Award clearly address the values of importance to the Horace Mann community. In examining the criteria for the Award, we have incorporated this feedback and have recommended

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6 Face the Nation interview.
that the Alumni Council revise the Award criteria, a recommendation which has been accepted by the Alumni Council. While, historically, many have referred to the Award casually as the “Distinguished Alumnus/a Award,” the focus of the deliberation has always been on achievement recorded at the time of nomination, a key nuance especially when evaluating nominees in the public realm. Pursuant to the revised criteria, in the future, the Alumni Council also will expressly consider how a candidate’s actions and achievements are consistent with Horace Mann School’s stated core values. The Alumni Council also will continue to seek to emphasize and showcase the uniquely wide diversity of talents, accomplishments, views, and opinions that are the pride and strength of the Horace Mann School community.

We continue to welcome engagement from our fellow alumni about any of the Alumni Council’s activities, and we are grateful to those members of the Horace Mann School community who have taken the time to nominate candidates for the Award. The list of potential nominees for the Award has always been built by our peers. In that, it reflects the Horace Mann School community’s values. The best way for us to build a complete and diverse list of deserving candidates who represent the best of Horace Mann School is to have input from all Horace Mann alumni.

We thank all members of the Horace Mann School community who took the time to voice an opinion on this important topic.