



University of Pittsburgh

Office of the Provost and Senior Vice Chancellor

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Ann E. Cudd
Provost
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Dear Jordan, Edenis and Jenea:

Thank you for writing and relaying your concerns in such an impassioned letter. We are directing this response to the three of you in hopes that you can share it with all of the supportive student leaders identified in your original message.

First and foremost: You are not alone in expressing your outrage. In the last two weeks, we've heard from many University of Pittsburgh students—particularly members of our African American and LGBTQIA communities—and we appreciate your calls to continue creating a respectful, peaceful, diverse, and safe learning environment.

We've also heard your appeals for greater transparency. Both individuals and news outlets have asked the University to disclose the specific steps and disciplinary actions that we have taken with regard to this issue. Our answer here is unwavering: The University takes the privacy of each individual student's educational information seriously, and we must comply with a federal law called the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA). As a result, we are not permitted to share certain details.

What we can confirm, per FERPA, is less specific: The individual in question is a Pitt student, while the purported target of these messages has no known ties to the University. We acted quickly to investigate and address this issue, including partnering with local police authorities. And our involvement—which continues today—has positioned the safety of our University community as a top and unremitting priority.

We can also confirm that our Student Code of Conduct clearly prohibits threats of violence and calls on all students to conduct themselves as responsible members of the Pitt community—both on and off campus. And, while certain racist speech may be protected by the First Amendment, racist comments run in absolute and stark contrast to the University of Pittsburgh's values and mission.

Our response has afforded due process to the student involved—as each of us would expect, should we be accused of a serious crime or conduct violation. On this front, we are moving as judiciously and expediently as law and fairness allow.

Our response has also focused on what we can say while reaffirming our values as a University and emphatically rejecting threats of violence, racist language and hate speech. But, to add this: We are in full agreement that incidents like this are deeply upsetting and exact a heavy emotional and psychological toll. Racial and homophobic slurs uniquely harm the sense of safety and belonging of individuals who identify with the targeted group. And, too often, these individuals are students of color, LGBTQIA students, and members of other historically marginalized communities.

We and every member of our University leadership team are dedicated to supporting an inclusive, safe and welcoming environment for each member of the Pitt community. We take this work—and our commitment to supporting diversity—very seriously. And we understand that we must remain diligent in addressing and confronting the underlying social and cultural

issues that drive hate speech and prejudice.

It's worth noting that our Student Code of Conduct and related policies are written and enforced consistent with the First Amendment. We understand your strong desire for a hate speech code, and we look forward to talking with you about how to strengthen our code of conduct in ways that remain consistent with the First Amendment.

In the coming year, we remain committed to doing just that: strengthening our Student Code of Conduct and seeking out new opportunities to discuss the destructive power of white supremacy, racism, sexism, gender discrimination, homophobia, transphobia and other forms of hateful language.

We look forward to working with you realizing these changes and hope to connect with you soon to share our plans and hear your ideas. If you are willing and able to meet, please [send us an email](#) so that we can continue this important conversation.

Respectfully,



Ann E. Cudd
Provost and Senior Vice Chancellor



Kenyon R. Bonner
Vice Provost and Dean of Students