



# FIRE

Foundation for Individual  
Rights and Expression

July 28, 2023

Matthew W. Schuyler  
Office of the Board of Trustees  
Pennsylvania State University  
201 Old Main  
University Park, Pennsylvania 16802

*Sent via U.S. Mail and Electronic Mail (mws18@psu.edu)*

Dear Chairman Schuyler:

The Student Press Freedom Initiative at the Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression (FIRE),<sup>1</sup> is concerned by Pennsylvania State University Board of Trustees' recent decision to completely revoke funding for *The Daily Collegian*. Less than a year ago, Penn State declared: "Free speech and expression of ideas are essential to higher education's academic and civic missions."<sup>2</sup> Yet, by obliterating support for *The Collegian*, Penn State makes clear the university supports expressive freedoms in name, but not practice.

*The Collegian* is an award-winning newspaper that has served an important role on Penn State's campus for nearly 120 years.<sup>3</sup> The paper itself has won three national Pacemaker awards—commonly considered the Pulitzer for student publications—in the past decade alone,<sup>4</sup> and its notable alumni include Sara Ganim, third-youngest winner of the Pulitzer,

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<sup>1</sup> As you may recall, FIRE is a nonpartisan nonprofit dedicated to defending freedom of speech and of the press on and off campus. You can learn more about our recently expanded mission and activities at [thefire.org](https://thefire.org). FIRE's Student Press Freedom Initiative (SPFI) defends free press on campus by advocating for the rights of student journalists at colleges and universities across the country.

<sup>2</sup> *WATCH: President Bendapudi addresses controversial speakers visiting Penn State*, PA. STATE UNIV., April 3, 2023, <https://www.psu.edu/news/administration/story/watch-president-bendapudi-addresses-controversial-speakers-visiting-penn-state>.

<sup>3</sup> *The Daily Collegian (historical)*, PA. STATE UNIV., <https://libraries.psu.edu/about/collections/digital-newspapers/daily-collegian-historical> (last visited Jul. 28, 2023).

<sup>4</sup> *2017 Online Pacemaker Winners*, ASSOCIATED COLLEGIATE PRESS, <https://studentpress.org/acp/awards/2017-online-pacemaker-winners> (last visited Jul. 28, 2023); *2013 Newspaper Pacemaker*, ASSOCIATED COLLEGIATE PRESS, <https://studentpress.org/acp/awards/2013-newspaper-pacemaker> (last visited Jul. 28, 2023); *2013 Online Pacemaker*, ASSOCIATED COLLEGIATE PRESS, <https://studentpress.org/acp/awards/2013-online-pacemaker> (last visited Jul. 28, 2023).

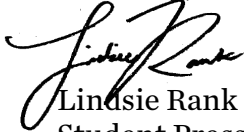
earned for breaking the Jerry Sandusky sex abuse story,<sup>5</sup> and Marian Coppersmith Fredman, the first female president of Penn State's Board of Trustees.<sup>6</sup>

We understand Penn State is operating at a deficit and seeks to balance its budget,<sup>7</sup> but financial decisions reveal value judgments. The deficit is apparently not so low as to prevent the university from maintaining two private airplanes used for personal travel by administrators.<sup>8</sup> And like many state universities, Penn State prioritizes athletic expenditures, including a \$700 million stadium renovation<sup>9</sup> and an annual salary of more than \$6 million for its football coach.<sup>10</sup> The deficit also does not appear to necessitate cutting the more than \$400,000 of funding for publications by university Development and Alumni Relations.<sup>11</sup>

Yet, for *student* publications, the university says it cannot afford *The Collegian's* traditional \$425,000 allocation, or to even maintain the newspaper's current \$200,000 allocation. In other words, Penn State puts a value of \$0 on an independent student press.

Penn State has an opportunity to put its money where its mouth is: If the university truly believes in the importance of a free speech culture, it must invest in student voices, including *The Collegian*. Please respond to this letter substantively no later than close of business on Friday, August 11, 2023, outlining how Penn State intends to support student press.

Sincerely,



Lindsay Rank  
Student Press Counsel

Cc: Neeli Bendapudi, University President

<sup>5</sup> Mallery Tenore Tarpley, *Sara Ganim, 24, wins Pulitzer for coverage of Penn State sex abuse scandal*, POYNTER, Apr. 16, 2012, <https://www.poynter.org/newsletters/2012/sara-ganim-24-wins-pulitzer-for-coverage-of-penn-state-sex-abuse-scandal>.

<sup>6</sup> Wendy Kops, *University life quite different for women of '50s*, DAILY COLLEGIAN, Mar. 27, 1992, [https://www.psucollegian.com/archives/university-life-quite-different-for-women-of-50s/article\\_e1f96d86-ebb8-581a-b0de-b1b8470b161f.html](https://www.psucollegian.com/archives/university-life-quite-different-for-women-of-50s/article_e1f96d86-ebb8-581a-b0de-b1b8470b161f.html).

<sup>7</sup> *Board approves tuition, operating budgets through 2024-25*, PA. STATE UNIV., Jul. 20, 2023, <https://www.psu.edu/news/administration/story/board-approves-tuition-operating-budgets-through-2024-25>.

<sup>8</sup> Wyatt Massey, *How often are Penn State's private planes flying during a budget crunch?*, SPOTLIGHT PA, Dec. 6, 2022, <https://www.spotlightpa.org/statecollege/2022/12/penn-state-psu-james-franklin-private-plane-transparency>.

<sup>9</sup> WNEP Web Staff, *Renovations coming to Beaver Stadium*, WNEP, May 8, 2023, <https://www.wnep.com/article/sports/college/penn-state/renovations-coming-to-beaver-stadium-state-penn-college/523-411e5a33-47b1-44c2-aef3-c2aec2501375>.

<sup>10</sup> *Pennsylvania State University Right to Know Law Report*, PA. STATE UNIV., May 31, 2023, 9, <https://budgetandfinance.psu.edu/sites/budgetandfinance/files/right-to-know-2022.pdf>.

<sup>11</sup> *2019-20 Operating Expenditures Development & Alumni Relations - All Funds*, PA. STATE UNIV., <https://budget.psu.edu/openbudget/AllFundsTotalActuals.aspx?FY=20192020&AdminArea=047> (last visited Jul. 28, 2023).