



August 26, 2025

Lori Mann Bruce  
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University of Tennessee at Chattanooga  
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615 McCallie Avenue  
Chattanooga, Tennessee 37403

**URGENT**

*Sent via Next Day Delivery and Electronic Mail (lori-mann-bruce@utc.edu)*

Dear Chancellor Bruce:

FIRE, a nonpartisan nonprofit that defends free speech,<sup>1</sup> is alarmed by the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga's blanket suspension of all fraternity and sorority activities. UTC's guilt-by-association punishment violates students' First Amendment rights to free expression and association while failing to meaningfully further campus safety. We urge UTC to immediately lift this suspension and to commit to individualized disciplinary determinations going forward.

Our concerns arise from Vice Chancellor Artanya Wesley's August 22 directive to all UTC Greek organizations to cease "all fraternity and sorority activities," including "social events, recruitment/intake activities, new member education, and organizational programs" until September 5.<sup>2</sup> Wesley cited "recent events that have appeared in the media and raised concerns regarding fraternity and sorority life."<sup>3</sup> UTC claims this suspension is to "ensure the health and safety of all students," but has not disclosed the alleged misconduct or which groups were allegedly involved.<sup>4</sup>

Given this lack of specificity, it would appear the decision responds to recent news reports of a sexual assault after an unspecified fraternity party and hazing involving another fraternity

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<sup>1</sup> For more than 25 years, FIRE has defended freedom of expression and other individual rights on America's university campuses. You can learn more about our mission and activities at [thefire.org](https://thefire.org).

<sup>2</sup> Email from Artanya Wesley, Vice Chancellor, to UTC Fraternity & Sorority Life Community (Aug. 22, 2025, 2:34 PM) (on file with author).

<sup>3</sup> *Id.*

<sup>4</sup> *Id.*

chapter.<sup>5</sup> However, these incidents did not involve all 25 UTC fraternities and sororities, but instead just these two chapters.

UTC's suspensions flout the First Amendment and common sense. During the crucial start of the semester, a period where student groups recruit new members and establish themselves on campus, UTC has banned *all* fraternity and sorority activities of *every* Greek letter group—including those unconnected to any alleged misconduct. UTC has no legitimate interest in punishing innocent students, such as the many groups with clean disciplinary records and no allegations against them. The First Amendment does not tolerate blanket punishments imposed on groups for tenuous affiliations with purportedly delinquent parties.<sup>6</sup> And even when discipline rests upon formal association with organizations that have engaged in violence, courts have made clear that association alone cannot establish guilt.<sup>7</sup> Here, UTC must make individualized disciplinary determinations on only those groups accused of wrongdoing.<sup>8</sup>

Additionally, UTC's disregard for students' fundamental First Amendment rights is even more egregious because of the host of expressive events and activities it has banned. The virtually unlimited array of student activities encompassed by UTC's broad ban includes organizing political protests,<sup>9</sup> wearing Greek letters,<sup>10</sup> hosting philanthropic events,<sup>11</sup> as well as mundane student activities such as participation in library hours, group meals, and organizational rituals, regardless of any connection to the university. By banning a host of innocuous expressive activity protected by the First Amendment—divorced from university interests in student safety—UTC impermissibly restricts students' free speech rights.

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<sup>5</sup> *UTC student charged with sexually assaulting female student after offering her a ride home*, WTVC (Aug. 19, 2025), <https://newschannel9.com/news/local/utc-student-charged-with-sexually-assaulting-female-student-after-offering-her-a-ride-home>; *UTC suspends all Greek life activities following hazing investigation*, WTVC (Aug. 22, 2025), <https://fox17.com/news/local/utc-suspends-all-greek-life-activities-following-hazing-investigation>.

<sup>6</sup> See *Healy v. James*, 408 U.S. 169, 186 (1972) (“guilt by association alone, without [establishing] that an individual’s association poses the threat feared by” authorities “is an impermissible basis upon which to deny” expressive or associational rights).

<sup>7</sup> *Id.* at 171, 181.

<sup>8</sup> See *United States v. Robel*, 389 U.S. 258, 265 (1967) (“The statute quite literally establishes guilt by association alone, without any need to establish that an individual’s association poses the threat feared by the Government in proscribing it. The inhibiting effect on the exercise of First Amendment rights is clear.”) (footnote omitted).

<sup>9</sup> See *Buckley v. Am. Const. Law Found.*, 525 U.S. 182, 186–87 (1999) (the First Amendment’s protection is “at its zenith” when political speech is at issue) (internal quotations and citations omitted).

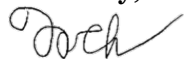
<sup>10</sup> *Tinker v. Des Moines Indep. Cmty. Sch. Dist.*, 393 U.S. 503, 505–06 (1969) (the First Amendment protects students’ expressive clothing).

<sup>11</sup> See generally *Reed v. Town of Gilbert*, 135 S. Ct. 2218, 2226 (2015) (content-based restrictions “are presumptively unconstitutional” and must satisfy strict scrutiny); *Iota Xi Ch. of Sigma Chi Fraternity v. George Mason Univ.*, 993 F.2d 386, 389–90, 392 (4th Cir. 1993) (the First Amendment protects students’ distasteful and offensive expressive events).

UTC also failed to provide the suspended groups due process prior to punishment, which is a wholly independent constitutional violation.<sup>12</sup> Before imposing an interim suspension, public institutions must inform students what they are “accused of doing and what the basis of the accusation is,” then provide the accused “an opportunity to explain [their] version of the facts.”<sup>13</sup> UTC’s own policies reserve this drastic sanction for students and groups that pose “a significant risk of substantial harm to the health or safety of others or to property; or ... an ongoing or imminent threat of disruption to or interference with the normal operations of the University.”<sup>14</sup> Yet UTC failed to provide each group with the allegations against them (if they exist) or any indication of how their activities endanger students or property. This blatant violation of due process casts doubt on the legitimacy of UTC’s actions and purported interest in student safety.

Given UTC’s ongoing violation of students’ constitutional rights, we request a substantive response to this letter no later than close of business Friday, August 29, confirming UTC will lift its blanket suspension and commit to individualized disciplinary determinations going forward.

Sincerely,



Zachary Greenberg  
Student Association Counsel, Campus Rights Advocacy

Cc: Artanya Wesley, Vice Chancellor  
Christy Waldrep, Assistant to the Chancellor  
Laura Petrus, Director of Student and Family Engagement  
University of Tennessee Board of Trustees

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<sup>12</sup> See, e.g., *Iota Xi Ch. of Sigma Chi Fraternity v. Patterson*, 538 F. Supp. 2d 915, 924–25 (E.D.Va. 2008), *aff’d on other grounds*, 566 F.3d 138, 149 (4th Cir. 2009); *Sigma Chi Fraternity v. Regents of Univ. of Colo.*, 258 F. Supp. 515, 528 (D. Colo. 1966) (requiring that university provide fraternity “adequate notice of opposing claims, reasonable opportunity to prepare and meet them in an orderly hearing adapted to the nature of the case and finally, a fair and impartial decision”).

<sup>13</sup> *Goss v. Lopez*, 419 U.S. 565, 579 (1975).

<sup>14</sup> *Code of Student Conduct*, Interim Actions, UNIV. OF TENN. AT CHATTANOOGA, 43 (rev. Aug 14, 2020), [https://www.utc.edu/sites/default/files/2021-03/studentcode\\_08-14-2020.pdf](https://www.utc.edu/sites/default/files/2021-03/studentcode_08-14-2020.pdf) [<https://perma.cc/5N57-6944>].