



Charlotte Arneson <charlotte.arneson@fire.org>

Baldwin Wallace University Response to December 22, 2025 Letter from the Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression

Lee Fisher <lfisher@bw.edu>

Sun, Jan 11, 2026 at 1:35 PM

To: Charlotte Arneson <charlotte.arneson@fire.org>
Cc: Lena Crain <lcrain@bw.edu>

Dear Charlotte,

Thank you for your thoughtful letter and for FIRE's steadfast commitment to defending free speech and freedom of association on college campuses. We share your belief that these principles are essential to higher education and to the vibrant exchange of ideas that Baldwin Wallace University ("BW") values deeply.

As I stated in my September 11, 2025 public statement to the BW community after the tragic killing of political activist Charlie Kirk (*see attached*), BW must be a front-line protector of the U.S. Constitution and the First Amendment. By promoting civil discourse, we help safeguard free speech—including the freedom to share ideas, no matter how varied or unpopular.

I am disappointed with the outcome of the recent vote by the BW Student Senate against the formation of a BW Turning Point USA (TPUSA) chapter. I was not asked to attend the Student Senate meeting or to take a position on the matter, but I decided to take a position in advance of the vote. Unfortunately, I was not able to attend the Student Senate meeting. Therefore, I sent the below November 11, 2025 statement in support of the formation of the BW TPUSA chapter to the Student Senate, and BW Dean of Students Léna Crain read my below statement aloud at the meeting before the vote.

If the BW Turning Point USA group of students chooses to seek reconsideration, I plan to support their request and work constructively to ensure that the Student Senate provides them another opportunity to seek recognition via viewpoint-neutral criteria. I recently met with the students who submitted the BW TPUSA chapter application and pledged to assist them in navigating this process, and I also discussed this matter with the Student Senate and offered to facilitate a constructive dialogue and resolution during the Spring 2026 semester. Per BW Student Senate procedures, denied organizations may submit for reconsideration anytime between now and one year from their original proposal date (until October 13, 2026).

Below are three statements concerning this matter: the BW statement of December 11, 2025; my statement of November 11, 2025 before the BW Student Senate vote; and the BW Student Senate statement of November 13, 2025 after the vote. The statements provide an accurate account of this issue and how it has evolved.

On Tuesday, November 11, 2025 the BW Student Senate voted 3 in favor, 16 opposed, and 1 abstention with respect to formation of a Turning Point USA chapter at BW. The Senate President stated that the group can ask for reconsideration at a later time. During the open forum, three students spoke in favor of the Student Senate recognizing a Turning Point USA chapter and three spoke against. Prior to the vote, BW students Grace Pruchnicki and Israel Gole spoke as representatives of the BW Turning Point USA student group and responded to questions from the Student Senate. Dean of Students Léna Crain attended and commended the students for participating in student government and asked that they productively share their perspectives. She reminded them of the importance of civil discourse across viewpoints, and requested that all remain respectful in their exchanges. Dean Crain reported that all attendees at the November 11 meeting engaged respectfully, and the meeting concluded and group dispersed without incident. Approximately 40 people attended.

There have been some allegations of inappropriate behavior by those opposing the formation of the chapter and those supporting the formation of the chapter. We take allegations of harassment or any other inappropriate action very seriously. The University has investigated the allegations consistent with our policies and obligations. The University has taken action, but internal investigations and actions involving alleged inappropriate student conduct are confidential-no matter the underlying subject matter. There has been no substantiated hate speech.

BW has long promoted civil discourse and the free exchange of ideas. Our Freedom of Expression Policy affirms that we welcome diverse perspectives and expect dialogue to occur peacefully and respectfully. When student organizations follow the procedures and policies established by the Student Senate, they should be evaluated based on those criteria - not on whether their viewpoints are popular or controversial. While the Student Senate is an elected student body that operates under established procedures, BW's policies and values require that decisions regarding student organization recognition be made using viewpoint-neutral criteria. We agree that this standard is critical to ensuring fairness and protecting expressive rights.

As President, I have a responsibility to ensure that all our students, staff, and faculty are comfortable exercising their right to freedom of speech but always in a civil manner, respectful of others' right to express their views. It should be pointed out that the concerns raised by some student senators who opposed the formation of the TPUSA chapter were not directed at conservative viewpoints or the formation of a conservative student organization. Rather, they expressed serious concerns that the TPUSA Professor Watchlist posed potential risks of doxxing or similar actions, and questions regarding a safe and inclusive environment. While Turning Point USA has a First Amendment right to publish a Professor Watchlist, some students believe that the list could chill academic freedom because it has the potential to intimidate and ostracize professors, leading to self-censorship and/or official sanction, which is incompatible with free academic discourse. As you know, historically, public watchlists such as the McCarthy-era blacklists, were used to punish listees for voicing their opinions and led to punishment, reprisal, and suppression of speech, an outcome at odds with free expression.

Thank you again for raising these concerns and for your advocacy on behalf of free speech. We appreciate FIRE's mission and look forward to working together to ensure that BW remains a place where disagreement is met with curiosity rather than hostility, and where ideas are debated with respect and integrity. I will continue to champion these principles and plan to organize a regular series of BW campus events in 2026 focused on free expression and civil discourse, similar to events I organized throughout my career including in my prior positions as Ohio Attorney General and Dean of Cleveland State University College of Law.

December 10, 2025 BW Statement on Outcome of Student Senate Vote on TPUSA Chapter

The Baldwin Wallace University Student Senate concluded its review of the application from Turning Point USA (TPUSA) to become an officially chartered campus organization on Tuesday, November 11. Following proper parliamentary procedure and open deliberation, the Senate voted and the application was denied with a result of 3 in favor, 16 opposed, and 1 abstention.

This decision was made following an open forum where approximately 40 students attended. Prior to the discussion and deliberation, Dean of Students Dr. Léna Crain commended the students gathered for using expressive activity and student government as a means of productively sharing their perspectives. She reminded students to approach and debate the issue with respect for diverse viewpoints.

Dean Crain also read a written statement from BW President Lee Fisher before the Student Senate meeting supporting recognition of the chapter. Fisher noted, in part, "The real test of our commitment to free expression comes when we strongly disagree with a speaker or organization. In those moments, it's essential that we hold fast to the principles and values of free expression, open dialogue, mutual respect, and civil discourse. These are the foundations of a healthy campus community built on trust." (*See President Fisher's entire statement below.*)

Six students spoke during public comment—three in favor of recognition and three opposed. That was followed by senators questioning leaders of the petitioning organization. After considering all perspectives, including comments at two prior Student Senate meetings, the body voted to decline the application without comment.

A rationale for the decision was later provided in a written statement by the Student Senate that reaffirmed the elected student representatives' commitment to "free speech, open dialogue, and the exchange of diverse viewpoints" and noting that "The concerns raised were not directed at conservative viewpoints or the formation of a conservative student organization. Instead, students and Senators identified specific issues related to the application and its affiliation with the national TPUSA—such as the *Professor Watchlist*." (*See the BW Student Senate statement below.*)

Per Student Senate procedures, denied organizations may submit for reconsideration anytime between now and one year from their original proposal date (until October 13, 2026).

“BW appreciates the professionalism and respect demonstrated by all attendees during the meeting. The University remains firmly committed to the principles of free expression, open dialogue and civil discourse,” said Dean of Students Léna Crain. “Our campus values the exchange of diverse ideas and viewpoints, which are essential to the educational mission and the development of engaged citizens. The University encourages continued healthy dialogue and engagement from all members of the BW community.”

November 11, 2025 Statement by BW President Lee Fisher

Dear Members of the Student Senate,

I sincerely regret that I am unable to attend this evening’s Student Senate meeting. I have asked Dean Léna Crain to read my below statement at the meeting.

As I shared in my public statement on September 11, following the tragic murder of Charlie Kirk, campuses like ours must be front line protectors of the U.S. Constitution and our First Amendment. By promoting civil discourse, we help protect free speech – including the freedom to share ideas, no matter how varied and diverse, even when they differ greatly from our own.

The real test of our commitment to free expression comes when we strongly disagree with a speaker or organization. In those moments, it’s essential that we hold fast to the principles and values of free expression, open dialogue, mutual respect, and civil discourse. These are the foundations of a healthy campus community built on trust.

This is also an important opportunity for, you, our students — both those involved in the proposed Turning Point USA chapter and those who disagree with the views of Turning Point USA — as well as all of us across the university — to be a model of what true free expression looks like in action. Many people who aren’t in this room are watching closely, looking to see how we handle this and other moments that test our values. Let’s show ourselves — and others — that civil discourse can work, that we can listen, learn, and lead with respect even when we disagree.

In keeping with these values, I support the approval of the proposed Turning Point USA chapter. While this reflects BW’s shared commitment to free expression, it is my personal perspective. It is neither the official position of the university nor an endorsement of any particular viewpoint.

Thank you for your consideration.

Lee Fisher

President, Baldwin Wallace University

November 13, 2025 Statement by BW Student Senate

Baldwin Wallace University Student Government remains committed to free speech, open dialogue, and the exchange of diverse viewpoints. In accordance with our Constitution, we uphold these protections while safeguarding the welfare and interests of students.

The proposed Turning Point USA (TPUSA) charter did not receive the required majority vote for approval. Senators followed standard procedure by reviewing the application and considering feedback shared during public forum sessions.

The concerns raised were not directed at conservative viewpoints or the formation of a conservative student organization. Instead, students and Senators identified specific issues related to the application and its affiliation with the national TPUSA—such as the *Professor Watchlist*, potential risks of doxing or similar actions, and questions regarding a safe and inclusive environment. These topics were further reviewed during the Senate’s deliberations.

Students remain free to express their beliefs, engage in political dialogue, and organize informally within University guidelines. The Senate will continue to support free expression while upholding student safety, inclusion, and procedural integrity.

Sincerely,

Lee

Lee Fisher

President, Baldwin Wallace University

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Scheduling Matters: Michelle Moscarino, Executive Assistant (mmoscari@bw.edu)

BW Matters: Lacey Kogelnik, Chief of Staff/VP, Career Readiness (lkogelni@bw.edu)

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I respect the boundaries between our work/career and personal lives. I sometimes send emails on evenings and weekends, but I have no expectation that you read or respond to any email until you resume your working hours.

From: Charlotte Arneson <charlotte.arneson@fire.org>
Sent: Monday, December 22, 2025 1:00:13 PM
To: Lee Fisher <lfisher@bw.edu>
Cc: Michelle Moscarino <mmoscari@bw.edu>; Lena Crain <lcrain@bw.edu>; Student Clubs <stuclubs@bw.edu>
Subject: EXT: Letter from the Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression, December 22, 2025

Dear President Fisher,

Please see the attached letter from the Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression (FIRE). A copy of this letter was sent via U.S. Mail today.

Sincerely,

Charlotte

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Charlotte Arneson

Program Officer, Campus Rights Advocacy
Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression (FIRE)
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thefire.org

 **BW President Lee Fisher Statement on Death of Charlie Kirk 9.11.25.pdf**
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