

Marie McMullan <marie.mcmullan@fire.org>

UMD Response to FIRE re SSI Protest

Christopher Bowie Lord <cblord@umd.edu>
To: Marie McMullan <marie.mcmullan@fire.org>
Cc: Christopher Bowie Lord <cblord@umd.edu>

Fri, Jan 9, 2026 at 4:59 PM

Ms. McMullan:

Thank you for your email. I apologize for my delay in responding; as you may know the University was closed until January 5.

The University appreciates FIRE's concern and position on this matter, and fully shares its commitment to the freedom of the press, including student journalists, to investigate and report on newsworthy events. I believe, however, that the situation has not changed since my letter to you. As you know, the students at issue are alleged to have done more than merely cover, as journalists, other individuals' protest of the SSI event; instead, it is alleged they were aware of and participated in such protest, albeit by recording and planning on reporting on it, rather than waving signs and shouting.

While the students have apparently shared their version of events with FIRE, the determination of whether the students were part of the protest will be made by the assigned student conduct officer pursuant to the Code of Student Conduct. The Code of Conduct Student does not provide for, and it would not be fair to the complainants, to summarily dismiss a complaint before the conduct conference is held simply because the respondent students have maintained their innocence and/or because of advocacy from a third party urging such dismissal. Such decisions are made at the conclusion of the disciplinary conference, not beforehand. The students will have a full and fair opportunity to share their version of events with the student conduct officer when they have their disciplinary conferences. The conduct officer will then make a final determination after consideration of all of the evidence, including the student's explanations.

Finally, I want to reiterate what I wrote in my letter. Nothing in the foregoing should indicate in any way that any decision has been made or that the students in fact violated the Code of Student Conduct. That decision will be made by the conduct officer pursuant to the prescribed process, and the disciplinary conferences have not been held yet. I merely want to point out that the University is committed to following its established procedures in reaching a final determination, and that the students will have the opportunity to share the same information with the conduct officer as they shared with FIRE.

Thank you again for your correspondence.

Sincerely,

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