

Council of Graduate Students
Michigan State University

Resolution: 22-FS-14

Title: A resolution demanding an apology from Trustee Pat O’Keefe

Introduced by: The Council of Graduate Students (COGS)

Supported by: The 2022-2023 COGS Executive Board

**THE COUNCIL OF GRADUATE STUDENTS OF MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY
ENACTS:**

WHEREAS, Trustee Pat O’Keefe stated the following at an MSU Board of Trustee meeting with full media coverage on Oct. 28th [1]:

-“Having numerous friends at boards at other universities, they all reminded me that you’re not doing your job until you get a vote of no confidence from the faculty, as silly as that sounds.”

-“But to the faculty and the Senate, I want you to know that I am tired of reading about the sexual transgressions of the faculty—which are like reading Fifty Shades of Grey and are as long as Gone with the Wind—without knowing what the outcomes are of such behavior.”

-“I find it an interesting strategy by the faculty and the provost to make this about academic freedom and the termination of [Dean Sanjay Gupta]. None of those are true. This is an attempt by the faculty to thwart a review of the processes that should be designed for a safe campus. You’ve never heard the board even utter that reinstatement is a possibility. As a practical matter, the terminated dean hasn’t asked for that. And why would he? This is about corralling the unchained sexual promiscuity of the faculty who seem to have unfettered access to our most vulnerable student population, with little to no repercussions in some instances.”

-“We are not, as a board, going to get pregnant with information on the sexual transgressions of the faculty without a plan to remove the excrement from this campus.”;

WHEREAS, The remarks made by Trustee O’Keefe were directed towards MSU faculty as a whole without acknowledgement of or care for any MSU Faculty who have been victims of sexual misconduct or who are actively working towards the enforcement of Title IX with the exception of the Title IX Office staff;

WHEREAS, Trustee O’Keefe made inflammatory references to words often associated with sexual assault, including “sister survivors”, “pregnant”, “doodling [sic]” (in reference to a sexual act), and “Nassar” seemingly to provoke a reaction without care for any of the survivors and community members who listened to his speech;

WHEREAS, The issues cited by Trustee O’Keefe were partially the result of several members of the Board of Trustees not fully reading official emails sent to them by the Office of Civil Rights, meaning that some of the blame for MSU’s inability to comply with OIE certification falls on the Board of Trustees [2];

WHEREAS, The Board of Trustees, including Trustee O’Keefe, delayed the release of information from their independent investigation into MSU Title IX compliance to the public except via the media for more than a month, thereby preemptively shielding themselves from deserved criticism, delaying an appropriate response to Title IX violations, and resulting in the resignation of President Stanley due to his lack of confidence in the Board of Trustees [3];

RECOGNIZING, That COGS agrees with the President of the Associated Students of Michigan State University, Jo Kovach (they/she), who publicly condemned the words of Trustee O’Keefe at the Board of Trustees’ meeting on Oct. 28th by stating [4]:

“I’m hearing the fact that you’re looking to protect students when you haven’t spoken to us. It feels like you are saving your own butts because of the certification process. If you really want to know how to protect students, ask us.”;

RECOGNIZING, That COGS agrees with the members of Academic Governance who responded to the words of Trustee O’Keefe at their Steering Committee meeting on Nov. 1st, 2022 in the following ways [5]:

-[The trustee's comments] “eroticized sexual victimization, which imparts a chilling effect on those reporting these events and trivializes the trauma of those who have been affected by them.”

-“These statements also demeaned the hard work and commitment of a vigilant faculty who cares deeply about the support and care of our students.”

- “This trustee’s remarks were uncivil, insensitive, and inappropriate. Moreover, they were uncaring and re-traumatizing for many in our community. This trustee [...] used their platform to suggest that faculty are sexual predators and attempted to set faculty and RVSM claimants at odds with each other.”

- “This trustee has decided to equate academic freedom with tolerance of harassers and abusers on campus, which is an intentional and gross misunderstanding of academic freedom.”

- “To the students, staff, and faculty who communicated to us their disbelief, incredulity, and trauma because of this trustee’s remarks, know that we hear you and support you.”;

BE IT RESOLVED, That the Council of Graduate Students demands that Trustee O’Keefe issue a respectful, public apology to the sister survivors and faculty of Michigan State University for

directing hurtful, crude, and near hypocritical rhetoric towards them in his speech on Oct. 28th, 2022.

INTRODUCED ON: November 16, 2022

VOTE TOTALS: 38
34 FOR
0 AGAINST
4 ABSTAIN



Recording Secretary



President

[1] "Past meetings." *Board of Trustees*, MP3 file. <https://trustees.msu.edu/meetings/minutes-past-meetings/index.html>

[2] Guzman, W. "Inconsistent messaging led to Title IX compliance failure at heart of issue with Stanley, board." *The State News*, 30 Sept. 2022.

https://statenews.com/article/2022/09/inconsistent-messaging-led-to-title-ix-compliance-failure-at-heart-of-issue-with-stanley-board?ct=content_open&cv=cbox_latest

[3] Barrett, V. "Trustees Knake Jefferson, Scott did not review Title IX certification, report says." *The State News*, 4 Nov. 2022. https://statenews.com/article/2022/11/trustees-knake-jefferson-scott-did-not-review-title-ix-certification-report-says?ct=content_open&cv=cbox_latest

[4] Slagter, M. "Michigan State trustees regret 'distrust' among members during emotional meeting." *MLive*, 28 Oct. 2022.

<https://www.mlive.com/news/2022/10/michigan-state-trustees-regret-distrust-among-members-during-emotional-meeting.html>

[5] Barrett, V. "Academic Governance members call O'Keefe's comments a 'a threat and danger' to the university." *The State News*, 3 Nov. 2022. <https://statenews.com/article/2022/11/academic-governance-members-call-trustee-okeefes-comments-a-danger-to-the-university>

