



September 16, 2022

Dear Mr. Blumenfeld and Mr. Klugman:

Thank you for forwarding to me the September 13, 2022, statement signed by a significant group of state and local faith and community leaders expressing their deep concern about sidewalk chalkings targeting Jewish student organizations on our campus.

I share your tremendous disappointment about these antisemitic chalkings on our campus on the first day of classes. As you recognize, these statements went beyond political views about Israel and Zionism and included antisemitic statements that wrongly and unfairly ascribed actions and beliefs to our Jewish students based on their participation in Jewish student organizations.

I recognize and am sorry for the significant impact these chalkings had on our Jewish students, faculty, and staff as well as other members of the Madison and broader Badger community.

As an institutional leader, I am personally committed to creating a community where everyone is welcomed and feels a sense of belonging. As a legal scholar, I also recognize the obligations and requirements related to our role as a public institution serving the State of Wisconsin, and the ways that our legal commitments to the First Amendment can generate tension with our goals of inclusion. And as a member of the Jewish community myself, I deeply understand the corrosive impact of antisemitism, both in general, and in this instance.

Statements targeting students or student groups on the basis of identity cause serious damage to the culture of belonging for which we strive. We at UW–Madison care deeply about being a place where all of our students – including our substantial Jewish community – feel a strong sense of inclusion and belonging.

I also very much appreciate your recognition of the importance of education in responding to situations like this one, and that engagement is already underway. My understanding is that a student organization, Students for Justice in Palestine (SJP), has taken responsibility for these chalkings. Our Student Affairs leadership has reached out to SJP's leadership and will be speaking to them to emphasize the impact of their actions and the harm caused by these chalkings. Because our speech rules as a public educational institution protect even deeply offensive speech, this engagement will be educational rather than disciplinary. But it is critical to name and discuss why actions like these hurt

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our community. More broadly, we will continue to focus our efforts on creating more opportunities for restorative dialogue and education about the harm caused by antisemitism as well as other forms of prejudice and bigotry. UW–Madison also has a robust bias reporting process in which every complaint receives follow-up, and our Student Affairs staff serve as a resource to those affected by such situations.

I have also reached out to Rabbi Mendel Matusof at Rohr Chabad House and Greg Steinberger, CEO/President of UW Hillel, to convene a meeting with them and a group of students, faculty, and staff, along with several members of my leadership team, both to discuss this incident, and, more broadly, the experience of being Jewish on our campus.

I recognize that we are in a moment when antisemitic incidents across the country have been increasing significantly, and that too is of concern to us as an institution and to me personally. It is critical for all of us to call out antisemitism as well as other forms of prejudice and bigotry, and I appreciate that your letter is a contribution to doing precisely that.

Again, I sincerely thank you for your message and I look forward to continuing our dialogue.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Jennifer L. Mnookin". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Jennifer L. Mnookin  
Chancellor