



THE TEMPLE-TIFERETH ISRAEL

Richard A. Block, Senior Rabbi • Rosette Barron Haim, Rabbi • Roger C. Klein, Rabbi • Kathryn Wolfe Sebo, Cantor
Bob Allenick, Executive Director • Stacy Schlein, Rabbi - Director of Education • Jeanne Tobin, President

September 15, 2014

Dr. Roderick J. McDavis
Office of the President
Cutler Hall 108
Athens OH 45701

Dear President McDavis,

I am Senior Rabbi of The Temple – Tifereth Israel in Beachwood, Ohio, the home congregation of Rebecca Sebo, one of the four students arrested at the recent Student Senate meeting. Coincidentally, I am also President of the Central Conference of American Rabbis.

I am writing to express my profound concern and disappointment at the arrest of these students, who were peacefully expressing their disapproval of the shameful action of the Student Senate President, who had perverted the symbolism of a campaign to eradicate a deadly disease into an expression of her personal political beliefs. I find it astonishing that she was allowed to marshal the legal authority of the university to suppress dissent and criminalize those who disagreed with her. By so doing, she made Ohio University complicit in her behavior.

Surely you agree that a sacred and foremost responsibility of any university is to protect its students. The arrest aside, when I watched the video of the episode, I was appalled to see that adults, who I understand had no affiliation with Ohio University, were allowed to attend the meeting and to attempt to shout down your own students. Even more horrifying, I understand that an OU faculty member of the School of Dance, Film and Theater, in which Becky is a student, hurled epithets including “fascist bully” at her and the other students. Such behavior is not merely insulting and hateful. It is intimidating and threatening. Given the disparity in power between faculty members and students, it is also abusive. Such behavior by faculty toward students cannot be tolerated at any university that takes the welfare and safety of its students seriously.

Regrettably, this unfortunate episode has drawn extremely negative attention to Ohio University, locally, nationally, and internationally, and threatens to do irreparable damage to the school’s outstanding reputation. I urge you strongly to ask, in the name of the University, that the charges against the four students be dismissed and that the conduct of the faculty member involved be examined for possible disciplinary infractions. Decisive leadership is needed before it is too late.

Sincerely,

Richard A. Block
Senior Rabbi

