

Graduate Student Government
Office of the President

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Re: Regarding Our Community, Safety, and Civility

Dear members of the Graduate Student Body,

It has come to our attention that members on both sides of a recently contentious issue have come forward with safety concerns following divisive statements made by a student organization in support of the view and opinion of the Waterville Mayor, Nick Isgro. It should be noted that since his proclamation against Indigenous People's Day, which included the inclusion of violent, colonial-era propaganda, residents of the town of Waterville have repeatedly voiced their concern over his inappropriate language, and neglect in representing the views of the people of Waterville on this issue. Mayor Isgro has responded on numerous occasions to these concerns by shutting out his constituents, storming out of council meetings, and stubbornly sticking to outdated views despite cries from his community to reconsider his stance.

As the Graduate Student Government, and as citizens, visitors, and believers in the nature of the democracy of the United States, we are obligated to speak out against this blatant disregard of democratic principles, accountability, and respect to the constituents of the town of Waterville, as well as to the duties of a Mayor within the State of Maine, under the direction of Governor Janet Mills who officially proclaimed the change to Maine's calendar. We remind our community that there are those within this state and this University who still live with the recent trauma of the way in which Europeans began to enter this country around 500 years ago; and yet, whose communities have extended the hand of forgiveness, cooperation, and acknowledgement of our right to live out full and wholesome lives on their Native land. We admonish the recent statements which sought to divide our community based on outdated principles, and disrespect the very basis of the relationship this state and this community is building with our Native Peoples. Impacted, as well, are those in our community who have experienced the violence of racial divides and segregation, and those who still face innumerable obstacles on their path to achievement simply because of the color of their skin and the regions in which they were born. It is unacceptable to continue to forge divisions within our community, as individuals, and especially as officially recognized University of Maine student organizations..

On this campus, we continue to support the Constitutional protections outlined in our nation's declarations; however, freedom of speech has both legal and ethical constraints that all members of this country, whether permanent or temporary citizens, whether here by transplantation or by nature, must effort to live by and respect. This includes inciting violence, or

any action or belief which threaten an individual's right to safety and autonomy, or causes physical or psychological harm. Setting ourselves to higher moral and ethical standards only strengthens our community, and therefore benefits all of us within. Safe and civil communities thrive. While divided, tense, and uncivilized communities regress, and become unproductive and unsafe for all.

As we progress into the second half of the Fall Semester, I encourage you all to be seeking opportunities to increase your exposure to one of the best resources on this campus- each other. In every aspect of your lives- educational, social, professional, emotional- your peers and your community are readily available to you in times of need. As members of the UMaine community, we are among the most fortunate in this state, this country, and the world, to have the opportunity to seek higher education and be among fellow researchers, academics, and professionals from unique and rich cultures and communities. Take advantage of this opportunity to the best of your ability.

I write you today to emphasize the importance of continuing to build a strong, and resilient community within this campus. This includes facing challenges, such as coexistence among those who disagree with you, and learning civil and respectful language and discourse during debate, contention, and in your daily lives. The importance lies not just in sustaining a robust community, rich with opportunities to gain knowledge and professional development; it is also in the best interest of each individual on this campus. Learning to function, learn, grow, and work collaboratively in a diverse environment is critical to each of our success in the future. Exposure to one another, gaining cultural competence and enhancing our interdisciplinary and cross-cultural collaboration of ideas, is extremely beneficial in the globalized world we live in today.

Globalization has made our world both excitingly, and scarily, close, challenging those of us who have not had the opportunities prior to this time in our lives, to interact with those who are unfamiliar to our own cultures. Up until now, many of us have been safely and comfortably in echo chambers of familiar views and voices, within our local communities and families, and even within certain areas of this state or in our respective countries. We unite under the banner of this University with a common goal- to seek knowledge, higher education, and experiences that can lead us to success in future job markets. While we are here, we are colorful and unique, closely-knit family of students and professionals striving to support one another, and develop as individuals and communities of professionals within our fields.

The Graduate Student Government stands for the values stated in the University of Maine's mission, which is the helm of *all student organizations and campus-affiliated groups* according to both University policy, and the policies of both the Undergraduate and Graduate Student Governments: **“Opportunity for all members of the University of Maine community is a cornerstone of our mission. The university welcomes students, research partners and collaborators into an atmosphere that honors the heritage and diversity of our state and nation.”** This mission creates a safe atmosphere where all members of our community members can feel safe while pursuing their education- a feat that is often not easy for any of us. I remind you to look to each other for support, rather than seeking to find differences to divide our

community. I encourage you all to take the time to refine your messages, ensuring that you are inclusive of all views, and honoring the personhood of every member of this campus- even those who do not share the same beliefs as you.

The University of Maine strives to be a safe and inclusive community, where ideas, research, and student knowledge is innovative, rich, and diverse. The Graduate Student Government recognizes the need for understanding, education, and enhanced communication across this campus, and supports all efforts toward bridging divides, restoring civility and respect, and ensuring all members of our community feel safe to attend classes and participate in the rich community on this campus.

Sincerely,

Lacey Darling, President

Cat Lamb, Vice President

Suriya Prakaash Lakshmi Balasubramaniam, Secretary

Duwage Charitha Perera, Treasurer

Abigail Roche, Board of Trustees Representative

Haley Albano, Grants Officer

Sai Krishna Katta, Outreach and Professional Development Officer

and on behalf of the diverse Members of the GSG Senate.