Statement of Support

Murray State University's Gender Equity Caucus's Statement Denouncing Violence Against Women and Intimate Partner Violence

On the morning of September 10, 2022, a man exited a vehicle near "sorority row" where students had gathered for the Lambda Chi "Watermelon Bust" event. He was yelling, brandishing a knife, and carrying a Molotov Cocktail-style explosive which he proceeded to throw at the gathered students. Only the assailant was injured in the attack. The Gender Equity Caucus (GEC) acknowledges this as an act of attempted violence against women, and we stand in solidarity with the women who were targeted, those directly and indirectly affected, and all Murray State women, femmes, and gender-nonconforming individuals.

Only a year and half ago one of our students, Sarah Townsend, was tragically murdered. In March 2022, on International Women's Day, the MSU community listened to the voices and stories of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls. And, it has been barely a week since the tragic kidnapping and murder of Eliza Fletcher in Memphis, while the memory of Breonna Taylor, and her violent death, are never far from our minds. It is clear that this most recent attempted assault is just one of apparently endless examples of the national and global crisis of violence against women. According to UN Women, 30 percent of women globally experience some form of "physical or sexual intimate partner violence, non-partner sexual violence, or both at least once in their life." According to the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence, intimate partner violence in Kentucky exceeds the global averages, with 37.5 percent of Kentucky women experiencing intimate partner violence in their lifetime. Furthermore, Kentucky has the 11th highest femicide rate in the United States. As we consider these disturbing trends, we acknowledge that while anyone can be subject to violence, intersectional oppression means that some, especially women of color and trans women, experience it at disproportionate rates. According to the National Institute of Justice, 84% of indigenous women will experience violence during their lifetimes, usually at the hands of a non-indigenous assailant. The GEC condemns sexism, misogyny, and gender-based violence in all its guises, and we affirm the right of women, femmes and gender-nonconforming individuals to learn, work, exercise, play, and simply exist free from fear of control, coercion, and violence.

This weekend's events demonstrate the urgency of a problem that existed long before Saturday's attempted attack. This is a problem that the Murray State News identified as widespread, but troublingly underreported (October 2021). Greater transparency beyond meeting minimal reporting requirements and concrete actions to address the needs of vulnerable populations are essential for combating violence already shrouded in silence, secrecy, and shame. The Gender Equity Caucus commits to continuing support of the work of MSU's SART (Sexual Assault Response Team) and to partnering with survivors, allies, and advocates to develop a safer environment on campus; we further commit to undoing institutionalized sexism, misogyny, and gender based violence. We call on the wider Murray State community to join in these efforts.

We also encourage anyone struggling in the aftermath of this violence, intimate partner, or gender-based violence to reach out to the Murray State Oakley Resource Center (207.809.3016, Suite C102, Oakley Applied Science), Lotus Sexual Violence Resource Center (1.800.928.7273),

or Merryman House Domestic Crisis Center (1.800.585.2686) for support and services. If you are in immediate danger, please call 911. A 24-Hour Crisis Line is 1.800.585.2686 and the Rape Crisis Hotline is 1.800.656.HOPE (4673).

Statement of Solidarity

The Murray State Department of English and Philosophy stands firmly with Black Americans and all people of color. This summer, civil rights demonstrations have swept the nation, including several that have taken place in Murray, Kentucky, and the surrounding region. At many of these demonstrations across the nation and here in our own state, protesters have been met with draconian force. Police in Louisville, for instance, have routinely attacked peaceful demonstrators with tear gas—a chemical agent banned from warfare in 1925 by the Geneva Conventions. We have reason to believe many of our own students have been present at these demonstrations, where agents of the state have assaulted civilians for exercising their First Amendment rights. As a department, we express our solidarity with those who oppose the systemic patterns of police brutality and police militarization that disproportionately harm people of color. We condemn white supremacy in all its guises. We denounce all acts of state violence and repression against protesters. And we share the anguish and anger of the millions who fill the streets to grieve the murders of Breonna Taylor, George Floyd, Rayshard Brooks, and countless others.

As teachers, writers, and scholars of language, literature, rhetoric and philosophy, we acknowledge the power of education, critical analysis and cultural engagement to foster the practices of empathy, respect, curiosity and historical memory that we must continue to cultivate if we are to establish and maintain a just society. Working toward a just society includes recognizing the intersectional nature of race, gender, sexuality, class, ability and other factors. As the department that houses the Gender and Diversity Studies (GDS) program, we recognize our unique responsibility to carry out the university's broader commitment to diversity. In recognition of this responsibility, we commit to building on the work undertaken by our curriculum and program committees in recent years. This work has included a significant revision to the major in order to require courses in diverse literatures, an overhaul of one of our principal University Studies courses (HUM 211, The Humanities Tradition), and numerous new course proposals ranging from Special Topics in Diverse Literatures to World Literatures since 1900.

In light of recent events, however, we recognize that we still have much more work to do, not only in our curriculum design but also in the daily work of teaching, mentoring, service to the university and the surrounding community and supporting faculty and staff of color by working to identify and dismantle long standing barriers to genuine diversity and inclusion at Murray State University and in Calloway County. When our faculty members reconvene for the fall, we will move swiftly to establish concrete goals for the upcoming academic year and beyond. To that end, we will invite feedback from our current students, alumni of our department and colleagues across the university, and we will announce these goals publicly after the start of the fall semester. As members of this department, as faculty of Murray State University and as part of the Murray community, we owe it to our students and to the broader public to promote dignity

and justice throughout our teaching, scholarship, creative activity and service because we believe Black Lives Matter.