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PRESS KIT

BOWIE STATE UNIVERSITY PRESS BRIEFING

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Bowie State University Press Briefing Statements

October 2, 2020

[View the event recording here.](#)

PRESIDENTS OPENING STATEMENT

Good morning, everyone. Thank you for virtually joining us today on such short notice. I'm Aminta Breaux, president of Bowie State University.

Let me begin by saying how deeply disturbing it was to receive the report and view the images displayed on social media pertaining to the incident that occurred on our campus of Bowie State University on the late evening of Tuesday, September 22nd extending into the morning of September 23rd.

Since receiving the report, I called for an immediate review of the incident; and the university has taken steps to ensure the safety of those involved. I am pleased to report that there were no physical injuries resulting from the incident; but I remain deeply concerned about the events leading up to and during the event.

A preliminary review of the activities that evening has been conducted by the BSU Police Department. I will ask Dr. Johnson to provide a brief review of the incident. Chief Waiters will follow with information resulting from the preliminary review. Once Dr. Johnson and Chief Waiters have concluded, I will speak to you again to outline our path forward.

Dr. Johnson....

VICE PRESIDENT FOR STUDENT AFFAIRS STATEMENT

Thank you President Breaux,

The Bowie State University Police Department, review of video, and conversations with students informs my remarks. At approximately 11:15 p.m. on Tuesday, September 22nd, the police were dispatched to the Student Center in response to complaints from the nearby residence hall.

Approximately 20 minutes later, a second call was made to dispatch regarding additional noise in front of the Student Center. Three police officers and a security guard were dispatched. Upon arrival at the Student Center, officers report 50 – 60 students playing music. As the officers attempted to intervene, a young man began making remarks perceived as aggression toward the



officers. The young man refused to provide a Bowie ID and could not be identified as a Bowie student.

As the young man was being detained by an officer, multiple students began to shout at the officers. One female student followed the officer down the stairs on the side of the Student Center. The officer is observed pulling the female student by her clothing. The officer and female student are observed stumbling together down between 1-4 stairs.

Upon viewing the video, the officer was placed on administrative leave on Wednesday, September 23 pending a full investigation.

I have spoken personally with several students including the female student observed in the video. By recent count, she and I have spoken 5 times or more. Along with President Breaux, I have met both the mother and female student on the Bowie campus.

What we saw on the videos of what happened on campus last week was certainly not what *any* of us have come to expect at this great institution. While we have seen many highly charged interactions with police around the country, that is not the norm at Bowie State University.

Our Campus Chief of Police will now provide you with the findings of the preliminary investigation and the additional action we are taking on this incident. President Breaux will then provide you with Bowie State University's plan for moving forward.

BSU POLICE CHIEF/CAMPUS SECURITY STATEMENT

Good afternoon everyone and thank you for joining us today.

I am Colonel Ernest Waiters, Police Chief of Bowie State University's Department of Campus Safety, where I have served for over 10 years.

Based on our preliminary review of this matter, I can confirm some details.

First, on social media it has been alleged that the officer punched the female student in the face. Based on our preliminary review and conversations with the student, she was not punched by the officer.

Second, it had been alleged that the student struck the officer. After our review, we can find no evidence that the officer was struck by the female student.



Following the incident captured on video, the student complied with requests from the officer. At no time was the student handcuffed or placed in restraints. Both the officer and the student reported no physical injuries at the time of the incident.

There are still some matters that are currently under review that will now be taken up by an external agency. We have enlisted the Maryland State Police to complete this review.

The members of the Bowie State University Campus Safety team strive to serve with integrity, professionalism and honor in creating a campus environment that is safe and secure. I am committed to ensuring that all personnel are properly trained on appropriate de-escalation and community policing techniques.

Moving forward, we will be working closely with President Breaux and the university community to strengthen the relationship between Campus Safety and the student body.

Thank you.

PRESIDENT CLOSING STATEMENT

Thank you Chief, for that detailed description of the results of the preliminary review and status of the investigation going forward. We will be guided by the outcome of the external review.

I want you all to know that prior to this incident, Bowie State University police officers had enjoyed a positive, community-based relationship with our students, drawing on their initial police training to manage and de-escalate situations that occur on campus. Now, post-incident, we are assessing and moving forward to institute additional training in this area.

This incident has raised social justice concerns among many on and off campus. While it was very troubling for our community, it also provides a lens through which to review and discuss the principles of social justice and what we want for police-student interactions on our campus.

We are moving aggressively to unite the campus and address the needs of our students. In the nine days since the incident we have:

- offered mental health counseling to students where needed;
- engaged our academic faculty to offer forums examining aspects of social justice;
- developed activities promoting introspection and self-reflection; and
- initiated programs that bring students and police officers together in dialogue.

Bowie State is committed to advancing the ideals of social justice. We integrated it as a focused theme in our freshman seminar course for all new students this fall. We just yesterday formalized a Social Justice Alliance with the University of Maryland for collaborative research and joint learning opportunities.



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The steps we are taking now with our students, in the wake of this incident, will build on this active work in social justice education and usher in a new era of social and civic minded students able to think critically about these issues.

There is no quick fix to the issues we are facing, as they are pervasive in our country today. I am wholeheartedly committed to leading the effort with the support of the BSU community to move past this event and focus our attention on the great work that our students and faculty are achieving as we continue racing to excellence. We just celebrated an increase in enrollment this fall, in spite of the challenges imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic. Bowie State University is poised to make an even greater impact in this community. We are Bowie Bold and racing to excellence.

Thank you.

Frequently Asked Questions & Answers

Q: How long has the officer involved in the incident been employed with Bowie State University?

A: The campus officer involved has been employed with the university for one year.

Q: Has the officer involved in the incident been involved in any other similar altercations with students while employed at Bowie State University?

A: The officer involved in the incident has not been involved in any other similar altercation.

Q: Are you going to name the officer involved?

A: At this time, we do not believe it is necessary to refer to either the officer or the student by name.

Q: Was the initial call for the incident due to a noise complaint?

A: Yes

Q: What is the next step in the investigation phase?

A: The Maryland State Police will begin its investigation immediately. We are prepared to assist in any way that is deemed appropriate.

Q: What was the charge to the investigators?

A: The charge to investigators was to review the video recordings to determine the use of any physical force by the officer or student.

Q: Have any lawsuits been filed in relation to the September 22 incident?

A: No.

Q: Is there a police report available on the September 22 incident? What information, if any, has been redacted from the preliminary investigative report?

A: There is a police report on the September 22 incident that will be available to the press.

Q: Who will lead the external investigation of the incident? How long will it take to be conducted?

A: The Maryland State Police will conduct the investigation. We have not been told how long it will take.

Q: What's the status of the police officer involved now that the preliminary investigation is complete, and an external investigation is underway.

A: The officer remains on paid administrative leave.

Q: What are the sentiments of the student involved in the incident? Or, how did you determine that neither the officer nor student were at fault?

A: The student involved in the incident on campus was cooperative. It is our sense that this unfortunate incident will not deter her from continuing her education here at Bowie State. What we have shared here today are simply some of facts that do not appear to be in dispute. The investigation continues.

Q: What is Bowie State University doing to ensure that this situation does not happen again?

A: Tactics for crowd management and de-escalation of charged situations is part of initial police training for officers in our university police force. Now, we are moving to augment that with additional training. This will ensure that all members of the department are properly equipped to handle these situations, according the standard of excellence and civility on our campus.

Q: Given that you just had the launch of BSU and UMD's Social Justice Alliance yesterday, how do you envision using this approach to propel your efforts, specifically related to this incident?

A: We formed the Alliance, in partnership with the University of Maryland, as a means for addressing the critical issues we are facing in society related to social, racial and economic injustices. We want to engage the students and communities to pave the way for the change that we wish to see in our country.

Q: What type of training do Campus Police officers receive?

A: Campus Police officers receive training including, but not limited to:

- Diversity, equity and inclusion
- Trauma-informed victim response
- Violence prevention and de-escalation

Q: Are Campus Police officers armed?

A: Yes. Campus Police officers are armed, certified Maryland Police officers.

Q: Is there body cam footage from the officers that you are reviewing? Will that be made public at any point?

A: No, our officers do not wear bodycams.

Q: Why was the young man detained, for trespassing because he couldn't produce a student ID?

A: The young man was asked to produce a Bowie State University ID. He did not do so. He was not initially verified as a Bowie State University student. He was later identified as a Bowie State University student. No students have been charged.



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Q: What is the status of the officer involved in the incident? Is he still on administrative leave? Is he still employed by the university? Also, can you provide his name?

A: The officer remains on administrative leave. As the chief indicated, we have turned this over to the Maryland State Police Department. The officer is still an employee of the university, on administrative leave. To preserve the integrity of the investigation, we will not be giving his name at this time.

Q: Can you tell us more about the programs that brought students and officers together to talk which Dr. Breaux mentioned?

A: Please see the list below for some of Bowie State's upcoming university discussions, forums and activities to explore principles of social justice.

Bowie State University Discussions, Forums and Activities to Explore Principles of Social Justice

<p>Policing, Gen Z & Social Media: Bridging the Gap A discussion to uncover how one can make his or her voice heard, specifically on the topic of social justice issues.</p>
<p><u>The 30-Day Justice Plan</u> by Shaant Merchant A 30-day challenge to read articles, books, watch videos, and listen to audio based on content related to race relations in America. Ongoing discussions will follow.</p>
<p>Tap In- Bridging the Gap with Police and Students Educate students, faculty and staff on police interaction and civility in this time of civil unrest, as well as individual rights and responsibilities.</p>
<p>Triggered: What now... An interactive discussion for individuals to express their triggers in a variety of outlets. BSU will provide information that describes what triggers are, how to articulate them and ways to recognize and manage them in a healthy way.</p>
<p>Inhale/Exhale Attendees will be educated on the techniques and benefits of various breathing exercises that relieve stress and allow for better reactions to stressful situations.</p>
<p>Calming Conversations Develop coping skills that promote health and well-being.</p>
<p>The Talk: A discussion about Our Experiences with the Police A forum to encourage open discussions that allow students to feel empowered and heard.</p>
<p>“Feature Fridays: Labor of Love” Bowie State University will spotlight an advocate in the field that is working to reduce violence on campus.</p>
<p>Pearls for Girls (Series) Series of conversations that serve as a safe space for women to discuss various topics.</p>
<p>I AM An interactive program exploring one’s personal identity and how it relates to others.</p>
<p>Calming Conversations - Self-Care: Where Do I Go from Here? Provides tools for managing life as a college student.</p>
<p>Chat with the Chief Discussion with the Department of Safety on students’ issues and concerns involving the police.</p>
<p>Revolutionize Our Approach - #RealTalk A conversation on the importance of restorative justice in Brown/Black Communities.</p>