

May 14, 2026

VIA ELECTRONIC MAIL

Dr. Jane K. Fernandes
President
Antioch College
418 South Hall
Yellow Springs, Ohio 45387

Dear President Fernandes:

Mr. michael casselli, an associate professor of sculpture and installation with thirteen years of service to your institution, has asked for the advice and assistance of the American Association of University Professors regarding your administration's efforts to dismiss him from his tenured appointment.

As we understand it, you sent Professor casselli a letter on February 9, 2026, informing him that, following your review of a grievance filed against him by a colleague, you had determined that he had "engage[d] in misconduct that constitute[d] workplace violence under College policy." You wrote that your determination was based upon "undisputed facts, including [his] use of threatening, intimidating, and derogatory language in a public setting where students were present," and you told Professor casselli that you would initiate dismissal proceedings against him unless he agreed by February 13 to either resign or accept an unpaid, indefinite suspension from his duties with conditions on his reinstatement. "Failure to respond" or "refusal to commit in writing" to one of the options, you wrote, would "result in the College initiating termination proceedings" against him.

By letter of February 13, Professor casselli disputed your characterization of events, emphasizing that the incident did not involve "violence or threats of any sort," that it had not taken place in public or in front of students, and that he had not "acknowledged responsibility" for the incident or for "a similar pattern of conduct." He declined the options you presented, and he requested a hearing before the college's Faculty Promotion and Review Committee [FPRC] at which he could grieve your actions.

On February 19, after meeting with Professor casselli to ask why he had not chosen one of the options you presented to him in your February 9 letter, you gave him a letter stating that because he had not chosen one of those options and had allegedly refused to "commit to complying with Antioch policies," you were dismissing him for cause as of that same date. Although your February 9 letter had acknowledged that dismissal for cause under the faculty handbook required proceedings involving the FPRC and the board of trustees, your letter effected the termination immediately and apparently without those bodies' involvement.

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In fact, Professor casselli reports that on March 2, you sent him an email message stating that

The Board of Trustees has directed me to inform you that they are suspending your termination. They directed me to restore your pay and benefits while further investigation continues among which is an FPRC review. I am initiating these changes today for your benefit. In the meantime, and pending the completion of this process, you are not allowed on campus and you will not be able to teach Antioch classes.

As of this writing, Professor casselli reports that he remains suspended and has received no further word about the disposition of his case. Despite his repeated requests, he has not been provided a copy of the materials that the FPRC and board of trustees will review or the opportunity to respond to them. Of even greater concern to our Association, he has not been afforded a dismissal hearing before the FPRC, and none appears to be in prospect.

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The interest of our Association in Professor casselli's case derives from its longstanding commitment to the principles of academic freedom, tenure, and due process set out in the enclosed 1940 *Statement of Principles on Academic Freedom and Tenure*, a document jointly formulated by the AAUP and the American Association of Colleges and Universities and endorsed by more than 280 scholarly societies and higher-education organizations. We are pleased to note that section X of the Antioch College faculty handbook ("Academic Freedom") states that "all persons appointed to the faculty are entitled to academic freedom as set forth" in that *Statement*.

Procedural standards derived from the 1940 *Statement* are articulated in the enclosed *Statement on Procedural Standards in Faculty Dismissal Proceedings* and in Regulations 5 and 6 of the enclosed *Recommended Institutional Regulations on Academic Freedom and Tenure*. As these documents make clear, it is a fundamental and longstanding principle of academic due process that an administration seeking to dismiss a faculty member from an ongoing appointment must first present specific charges and afford the faculty member an adjudicative hearing before an elected faculty committee. At that hearing, the administration will bear the burden of demonstrating adequate cause for dismissal, preferably by a standard of clear and convincing evidence, and the faculty member will be permitted to appear before the committee, provide evidence, call witnesses, and be confronted with the witnesses against them. If the president disagrees with the faculty committee's judgement, they will transmit the case to the board of trustees, which will review the record of the hearing and afford the administration and faculty member the opportunity to provide further argument. If the board of trustees disagrees with the faculty committee's judgment, it will state its objections and return the case to the committee for reconsideration and response before it makes a final decision.

The dismissal procedures in section XX.A of Antioch's faculty handbook ("Termination for Cause") provide that in cases where the facts are in dispute—as they clearly are in Professor

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casselli's case—the faculty member shall have the right to a full on-the-record hearing before “all bodies that will pass judgment on the case,” including the FRPC and the board of trustees.

However, as noted above, we understand that Professor casselli has not been afforded a hearing before any of those bodies. We acknowledge that the administration has assured him that the FRPC will conduct a review of his case. But a review alone is no substitute for the full faculty hearing to which he is entitled under Association-supported standards and Antioch's faculty handbook.

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Our information regarding Professor casselli's case comes to us primarily from him, and we appreciate that you might have further information that would contribute to our understanding of events. We would accordingly welcome your response. However, if the facts cited above are essentially correct, and if the administration persists in its efforts to dismiss him, we urge in the strongest possible terms that the immediate next step should be to afford Professor casselli a dismissal hearing before the FRPC that conforms to the standards of academic due process outlined above and in the enclosed documents. Any action to dismiss him without such a hearing would be a matter of grave concern to our Association under its longstanding responsibilities.

We look forward to your timely response.

Sincerely,



Mark Criley

Senior Program Officer

Department of Academic Freedom, Tenure, and Governance

Enclosures by email attachment

Cc: Ms. Shalini Deo, Co-chair, Board of Trustees
Ms. Emily Siebel, Co-chair, Board of Trustees
Dr. Dean Snyder, Dean of Faculty
Professor Forest Bright, Chair, Arts Division
Professor Kevin McGruder, Faculty Representative to the Board of Trustees
Professor Kim Landsbergen, Member, Faculty Promotion and Review Committee
Professor Jennifer Grubbs, Member, Faculty Promotion and Review Committee
Professor Rahul Nair, Member, Faculty Promotion and Review Committee
Professor Gretchen McNamara, President, Ohio AAUP Conference
Professor michael casselli