

To: Dr. Catherine Stephens
From: Dr. Monica S. Blake-Beasley
Date: October 1, 2025
Subject: Response to Written Reprimand – Social Media Post

Dear Dr. Stephens,

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to the written reprimand I received regarding a social media post made from my personal account, on my personal time, and outside of the school setting. I would like to respectfully offer my perspective and clarify what I believe to be misrepresentations of both my intent and my character.

The comment in question was posted under a heading that read “Thoughts & Prayers,” and I shared a meme featuring a live turkey walking toward an oven, which inside was an already-cooked turkey, with the caption “FAFO.” My accompanying comment read, “I saw a meme that’s remarkably accurate in this situation. He thought some deaths were necessary to keep the 2nd Amendment relevant, but never thought it would be his own. Which brings me to the meme...” The acronym “FAFO” was used once, in the meme caption—not typed by me—and was meant to convey a somber observation about consequence. In my response to your questions, I referred to the use of the acronym as **colloquially blunt**, not vulgar, and I believe it’s important to distinguish tone and intent.

From my perspective, the turkey meme powerfully illustrated a cycle we’ve seen too often: individuals or institutions walking directly into danger while ignoring warning signs, an image I connected to the larger societal pattern of preventable tragedies. My comment was not made in humor or celebration but as a form of critical reflection. On the day I shared the meme, both a school shooting and a high-profile political assassination had occurred. The phrase “Thoughts & Prayers” has become a common response to these events, yet meaningful action remains rare. My post was intended to highlight the disturbing and repetitive nature of our national response: we mourn, we post condolences, and then we move on without implementing meaningful change. The oven and the cooked turkey symbolized the inevitable consequence of inaction, and my comment was a personal reflection on that fact.

I want to take a moment to clarify a key point in your letter. You wrote that I “acknowledged that it was unprofessional and vulgar” and that I “accepted that [I] had not conducted [myself] in a way that preserved the dignity of the profession.” With respect, I do not believe those statements reflect what I actually said. I did agree that such language would not be professional or appropriate in a classroom setting—an important distinction. However, I did **not** characterize my off-duty, personal expression as vulgar or grossly unprofessional. That framing represents your interpretation, not an admission made by me. My intention was never to offend or undermine the dignity of my role as an educator, but rather to express, in blunt terms, a deep frustration over senseless violence and the lack of response that follows it.

I also feel it's important to address a concern raised in the reprimand regarding whether I intentionally failed to disclose other posts when asked. When we spoke on Friday evening, my intention was to be transparent and ensure you would not be blindsided. When asked whether there were any other potentially problematic posts, I gave you the most accurate response I could at the time: 'No... not that I can think of.' My focus was on transparency and ensuring open communication, and I responded based on what I could recall in that moment. Later that evening, after a conversation with the author of the original post, I remembered that I had commented under it. Upon reflection, and with the discernment you encouraged me to use, I deleted the comment. Not because I believed it violated policy or reflected poor character, but because I understood how, taken without context, it could be misinterpreted. Out of respect for our conversation and the guidance you gave, I reviewed my entire activity history and removed anything I believed could cause further confusion or concern.

I want to emphasize that, according to your written reprimand, my principal stated that he does not believe my online comments have had any impact on the overall school environment. As you noted, there have also been no complaints from any current Criminal Justice students or their parents, and relatively few from within our broader school community. Those voicing concerns appear to be largely unaffiliated with our school or the Criminal Justice program of study.

Unfortunately, it's become clear that some of the initial accusations made against me contain factual misrepresentations and falsehoods, which I can demonstrate if needed. It is also troubling that individuals in far more senior positions within our organization have made inflammatory or politically charged public statements with no consequences—perhaps because their views align more closely with those now demanding my punishment.

The individual most aggressively and initially attacking my character is not connected to our school or district and has made racially inappropriate remarks publicly, including stating that she, a Caucasian woman, identifies as Black because she tans and gets darker in the summer. Her campaign to slander my name has not been rooted in concern for students or professionalism, but rather in personal and political bias. It's difficult not to see the resulting disciplinary action as disproportionate and influenced by external political pressures, rather than by the actual impact of my actions on students or our actual school community.

Politics is not something I teach in the classroom, nor is it part of the Criminal Justice curriculum. However, I cannot ignore the broader pattern this incident reflects—where educators who express ideas perceived as opposing certain political ideologies are disproportionately targeted. In that context, this reprimand feels more like a response to public outcry than to any demonstrable harm or violation of policy.

The language used in the reprimand, particularly phrases like “grossly unprofessional,” feels unnecessarily severe for an infraction that caused no classroom disruption and

originated entirely outside of the school setting. Considering this is the first concern raised in my teaching career, and that I took steps to address the situation proactively and in good faith, I believe the tone and framing of the reprimand are not reflective of my actual conduct or intent.

As required by the Tennessee Department of Education's Criminal Justice standards, I teach ethics, due process, identifying bias, fairness, character, and critical thinking. That requires helping students understand how these concepts appear in real-world contexts—especially in public discourse. The post in question reflected my personal reaction to ongoing societal issues and was part of how I personally process events that deeply affect our community and our country.

In closing, I respectfully request that this response be included in my personnel file alongside the reprimand, so that anyone reviewing my record has a complete understanding of my intent, my character, and the context of this situation. I remain committed to our students, our community, and to upholding the values and expectations of this profession.

I do, however, feel compelled to express one final concern: I believe we are setting a dangerous precedent by expecting educators to maintain an image of "professionalism" at **all** times in public spaces—even when off duty, in their own homes, without students, and on personal platforms. This expectation has far-reaching implications. If taken to its logical conclusion, it could mean that teachers are no longer free to engage in basic personal freedoms such as dancing in public, attending social gatherings, drinking a glass of wine, or even posting vacation photos in swimwear—let alone voicing informed perspectives on the social issues that matter to them.

This kind of overreach not only strips educators of their autonomy but also threatens to silence the very people who often champion equity, justice, and progress, which are all issues that directly impact the students and communities we serve. At a time when public education is already under intense scrutiny and attack, policies and practices that discourage open dialogue and punish educators for critical thought will only harm school culture and drive good people away from this profession.

I hope that moving forward, we can strike a better balance between accountability and humanity... one that respects both the dignity of the profession and the personal freedoms of those who dedicate their lives to it.

Respectfully,



Dr. Monica S. Blake-Beasley

Criminal Justice Educator