

NATIONAL COALITION AGAINST CENSORSHIP

July 7, 2020

Dr. Bryan Johnson, Superintendent
Hamilton County Schools
3074 Hickory Valley Road
Chattanooga, TN 37421

Re: DayOnna Carson's Speech at Central High School

Dear Dr. Johnson:

The National Coalition Against Censorship is an alliance of 57 national non-profits, including literary, artistic, religious, educational, professional, labor, and civil liberties groups. We promote freedom of thought, inquiry and expression for all Americans, including K-12 students, teachers, and staff.

We have read that the public address system used at the Central High School graduation ceremony was turned off before DayOnna Carson concluded her valedictorian address. According to press reports, the attendees were unable to hear DayOnna say, "No justice, no peace."

While we accept the District's explanation that cutting off DayOnna's speech was inadvertent, we are sure you agree that it is important that the views of young people are expressed and heard, particularly during the current national conversation regarding racial justice. We also believe that it is important that schools and other institutions go out of their way to make clear to students, families and the public that they support the rights of all students to express themselves, regardless of their views.

We are writing to inquire about the steps that the District is taking to provide Ms. Carson the opportunity to communicate her entire message to the student body of Central High School. Given that the District in its June 30 statement described Ms. Carson's speech as "timely" and as having "addressed some of the most important issues of the day," perhaps her entire speech could be re-recorded and presented to the student body on the opening day of the upcoming school year.

Thank you very much for your attention to this matter.

NCAC PARTICIPATING ORGANIZATIONS

Actors' Equity Association
AICA-USA
American Association of
School Administrators
American Association of
University Professors
American Association of
University Women
American Booksellers for Free Expression
American Civil Liberties Union
American Ethical Union
American Federation of Teachers
American Jewish Committee
American Library Association
American Literary Translators Association
American Society of Journalists & Authors
Americans United for Separation of Church
& State
Association of American Publishers
Authors Guild
Catholics for Choice
Children's Literature Association
College Art Association
Comic Book Legal Defense Fund
The Creative Coalition
Directors Guild of America
The Dramatists Guild of America
Dramatists Legal Defense Fund
Educational Book & Media Association
First Amendment Lawyers Association
Free Speech Coalition
Freedom to Read Foundation
Global Alliance for Behavioral Health and
Social Justice
International Literacy Association
Lambda Legal
Modern Language Association
National Center for Science Education
National Communication Association
National Council for the Social Studies
National Council of the Churches
National Council of Jewish Women
National Council of Teachers of English
National Education Association
National Youth Rights Association
The NewsGuild-CWA
PEN America
People For the American Way
Planned Parenthood Federation
of America
Project Censored
SAG-AFTRA
Sexuality Information & Education Council
of the U.S.
Society of Children's Book Writers
& Illustrators
Student Press Law Center
Union for Reform Judaism
Union of Democratic Intellectuals
Unitarian Universalist Association
United Church of Christ
Office of Communication
United Methodist Church,
United Methodist Communications
Women's American ORT
Woodhull Sexual Freedom Alliance
Writers Guild of America, East
Writers Guild of America, West

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Chris Finan". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Christopher Finan
Executive Director
National Coalition Against Censorship