



OFFICIAL STATEMENT

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Official Statement from President Dillard to the Shaw University Community

To the University Community:

On October 5, an incident occurred on a highway in South Carolina when 18 Shaw University student scholars and two staff advisors were traveling from Raleigh, North Carolina, to attend the Center for Financial Advancement Conference in Atlanta, Georgia.

Traveling by contract bus, South Carolina Law Enforcement stopped the team in Spartanburg County under the pretext of a minor traffic violation. A couple of officers boarded the bus and asked the driver where he was headed. Multiple sheriff deputies and drug-sniffing dogs searched the suitcases of the students and staff located in the luggage racks beneath the bus.

In a word, I am “outraged.” This behavior of targeting Black students is unacceptable and will not be ignored nor tolerated. Had the students been White, I doubt this detention and search would have occurred.

It’s 2022.

However, this scene is reminiscent of the 1950s and 1960s—armed police, interrogating innocent Black students, conducting searches without probable cause, and blood-thirsty dogs. It’s hard to imagine. Yet, it happened to the Shaw University community, and it is happening throughout this nation in alarming fashion. It must be stopped.

To be clear, nothing illegal was discovered in this search by South Carolina Law Enforcement officers. The officers said they stopped the bus because it was swerving and issued the driver a warning ticket for “improper lane use.” Throughout this unnerving and potentially dangerous situation, our students and staff conducted themselves calmly and with tremendous restraint.

I will modernize the words of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., with my own, “The ultimate measure of a man and woman is not where they stand in moments of comfort and convenience, but where they stand at times of challenge and controversy.”

Our students stood tall amid an unnerving and humiliating experience and because of their dignified and professional response, the situation did not escalate into something far more sinister.

So, I am extremely proud of our students and staff and how they responded under very trying circumstances. I am pleased to report they arrived safely in Atlanta to take full advantage of the Center for Financial Advancement Conference, where they actively engaged in sessions about financial literacy and home ownership. And they returned home safely to campus without incident.

We are eternally grateful.

However, I wish to be perfectly clear. The action taken by South Carolina Law Enforcement in Spartanburg County was unfair and unjust. I firmly believe had the bus been occupied by White students, they would not have been detained.

I have asked our Shaw University General Counsel to investigate this situation as we explore options for recourse—legal and otherwise—available to our students and the university.

Paulette Dillard, Ph.D.
President

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