

**Questions from Senator Ben Sasse**  
**U.S. Senate Committee on the Judiciary**  
**Hearing on “Free Speech 101: The Assault on the First Amendment on College Campuses”**  
**June 27, 2017**

*Questions for Dr. Fanta Aw, Interim Vice President of Campus Life at American University:*

I was a little confused by your testimony. I think we all agree that direct threats should remain punishable offenses. There seems, however, to be a movement by some to widen the boundaries of what speech constitutes a “direct threat of violence.” Many, for example, seem to want to conflate emotional well-being with physical safety.

- **Do you believe it is important for administrators to draw a crystal-clear distinction between verbal disagreement and actual violence?**

**Response:**

Thank you, Senator Sasse. We agree, there is a clear distinction between verbal disagreement and physical violence.

In our work with students, administrators strive to reinforce several important values, including protecting free speech, providing for public safety and creating an inclusive community where all can learn and thrive.

We have had many instances of students engaged in vehement verbal disagreements with speakers and with each other at protests. The goal is always to allow all to be heard without inciting violence or engaging in the “heckler’s veto.”