Ravi V. Bellamkonda, President of The Ohio State University and Presiding Officer of the University Senate
Bellamkonda.7@osu.edu

Sara Watson, Assoc. Professor of Political Science and Secretary of the University Senate
Watson.584@osu.edu

Valarie Williams, Professor of Dance and University Senate Steering Chair
williams.1415@osu.edu

Joel Wainwright, Professor of Geography and CAFR Chair
Wainwright.11@osu.edu

Chase Center Faculty's Response to the Report by the Committee on Academic Freedom and Responsibility

The Ohio State University

October 16, 2026

The report by the Committee on Academic Freedom and Responsibility (CAFR) dated October 1, 2026 describes a threat to academic freedom at the Chase Center. As faculty members of the Center, we write to affirm that not only have we not experienced any diminution of our academic freedom, but the committee's description of the conditions they believe threaten our freedom is wrong in every respect.

The committee writes: "The combination of the unaccountable power of the director of the Chase Center, together with the ideological nature of the Center's de facto mandate, create conditions that deprive the Center's faculty of robust academic freedom."

The falsity of the first condition is easily demonstrated by reference to the fact that the Center's director reports to the university's provost, president, and board of trustees. It is hard to know how to square this reality with the "unaccountable" power alleged by the report other than to say the report's description is simply false.

It is notable that the authors' concern for the Chase faculty did not extend to speaking with any faculty member about their actual experiences of academic freedom. We correct this puzzling omission by stating now that we have never felt our academic freedom to be compromised in any way. The director's frequent expressions of support for academic freedom, and conscientiousness in avoiding any implicit pressures that might serve to chill freedom of expression, contribute to an intellectual atmosphere of freedom that many of us find to be the most robust of our academic careers. We have had the freedom to publish both academic and public writing without interference of any kind. We have also enjoyed the freedom to propose and develop new courses that align with our own research and teaching interests. Such changes as we have had to make to our courses have been dictated not by the director, as the report suggests, but by the review process associated with the university's General Education Curriculum Committees.

The second supposed condition impinging on academic freedom concerns what the authors of the report take to be the Center's mission. They believe the Center's existence was inspired "by a diagnosis, popular in some circles in American politics, that Universities are in the grip of "leftist" ideologies." The implication that perception of ideological conformity is confined to the political right, and that the Center therefore exists to provide affirmative action for conservatives, betrays a fundamental ignorance about the national debate over intellectual diversity and freedom. Numerous studies, authored by scholars across the political spectrum, have established the reality of ideological conformity in many disciplines, and the associated epistemological and pedagogical problems that flow from this conformity. Recent statements presented by universities including Yale, Vanderbilt, and Cornell have acknowledged this problem. Steps to address it include the formation of numerous civic centers like ours in private

and public universities, in red states and blue. Thus the perception of the ideological skewing of American universities is widespread, bipartisan, and founded on robust evidence. It appears from the report that the authors are genuinely unaware of this reality. Such ignorance, as numerous studies have established, is itself a symptom of the epistemological costs of dwelling in ideological echo chambers.

The report's allegation that the Center's hiring represents affirmative action for conservatives is similarly groundless. Some of us have served on the Center's hiring committees, and can affirm that political orientation is never discussed in our deliberations. The reason for the fact that our faculty represent a diversity of views unusual in the humanities and social sciences is to be sought rather in the Center's commitment to academic freedom, in an academic world that has frequently compromised it. While the report's worries about the Center are groundless, there are legitimate concerns about our campus's climate that we look forward to partnering with the committee to address. The nonpartisan Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression currently gives OSU an "F" for free speech, its lowest rating.

At a time when public confidence in higher ed is at an all-time low, the CAFR report is unlikely to allay the widespread belief that partisan politics has compromised scholarly rigor and objectivity. The report invents and misrepresents basic facts, and fails to take minimal steps—such as actually speaking with faculty—to support its extreme allegations. We call on the committee to correct the report's errors, and look forward to serving as a partner to advance the cause of academic freedom at OSU.

Signed,

Members of the Faculty of the Chase Center:

Jacob Bruggeman, Assistant Professor

Albert Cheng, Associate Professor

Michael Clune, Professor

Christopher Green, Professor

Daniel Gullotta, Assistant Professor

Jacob Hall, Assistant Professor

James Hooks, Assistant Professor

Wan Ning Seah, Assistant Professor

Wesley Siscoe, Assistant Professor

William Simpson, Associate Professor

Jesse Smith, Assistant Professor

John Thrasher, Associate Professor