

Office of Institutional Equity

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Caroline Laguerre-Brown, J.D.
Vice Provost for Institutional Equity

April 3, 2013

VIA Email

Andrew Guernsey
President, Voice for Life



Dear Mr. Guernsey:

I write in response to your March 26, 2013 email seeking the views of the Office of Institutional Equity (OIE) on whether the proposed activities of Voice for Life -- namely, off-campus "sidewalk counseling" -- would constitute harassment under university policies. You indicated in your email that Voice for Life plans to stand on a public sidewalk outside of an abortion clinic and hand out literature and speak to women in a non-aggressive manner. You also wrote that Voice for Life pledges that it will not tolerate shouting, or physical obstruction of women seeking to obtain an abortion.

Your email references two policies that prohibit harassment: an Anti-Harassment Policy and an Undergraduate Student Code of Conduct. It is noteworthy that both policies underscore the free and open exchange of ideas that is fundamental to the University's mission. In this regard, the Anti-Harassment Policy specifically states that it is "not the University's intent in promulgating this policy to inhibit free speech or the free communication of ideas by members of the academic community" and the Conduct Code notes that membership in the university community carries with it an obligation to "protect the university as a forum for the free expression of ideas."

The Anti-Harassment Policy bars discriminatory behavior that is "so severe or pervasive that it interferes with an individual's work or academic performance or creates an intimidating, hostile or offensive working or academic environment". The Undergraduate Student Conduct Code states that students are "expected to refrain" from "[c]onduct or a pattern of conduct in which a person approaches or pursues another person with intent to place the person in fear of physical harm or with intent to harass or to intimidate the person."

My view is that the proposed "sidewalk counseling" activities, as described in your email, would not violate these university policies. A student group's distribution of literature and advocacy of its viewpoint, in the manner set out in your email, would not constitute

harassment within the meaning of these policies. In fact, such conduct is fully in accord with the university's robust commitment to the values of free expression and open debate that is articulated in these policies.

Please be advised this response is based on the description of the activities you provided in your message; it is not a finding or ruling regarding any future activities in which your group may engage. OIE has the responsibility to review and investigate any allegations of harassment brought by a member of the Hopkins community, which are reviewed on a case-by-case basis consistent with JHU policy and OIE's established protocol.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Caroline Laguerre-Brown', written in a cursive style.

Caroline Laguerre-Brown

cc. Susan Boswell, Dean of Students
Robert Turning, Director of Student Activities
Moses Song, SGA