

Faculty Senate

Draft Resolution
October 26, 2023



Whereas, On October 22, 2023, The State News reported¹ that Trustee Brianna Scott had sent a letter² to the Board of Trustees calling for Board Chairperson Rema Vassar to resign due to alleged inappropriate and unethical conduct; Trustee Scott's letter detailed times when Chairperson Vassar allegedly:

- overstepped her authority and appropriate role;
- inappropriately interfered with matters delegated to the administration;
- released confidential information without proper authorization;
- harmed MSU's reputation by causing negative press;
- appeared in an advertisement for the private wealth management firm founded and managed by a former trustee;
- responded with a "heart" reaction when another former trustee sent victim-blaming, egregious text messages regarding a prominent RVSM claimant;
- refused to give her phone to Jones Day, the law firm MSU hired to investigate who leaked that prominent claimant's name to the press, for forensic review as part of the investigation;
- caused the authors of an independent after-action report on the February 13 shooting to use softer language than appeared in a draft report to criticize some trustees who acted outside their appropriate roles in the aftermath;
- traveled on donors' private jets while conducting university business and dismissed suggestions that her conduct was not consistent with the university's standards; and
- threatened other trustees with accusations of racism if they voted for a bylaw amendment she opposed; and

Whereas, Trustee Dianne Byrum, former trustees Joel Ferguson and Melanie Foster, Senator Debbie Stabenow, and former governor James Blanchard have indicated³ their support for Chairperson Vassar's resignation; and

¹ See Alex Walters, *MSU trustee calls for board chair Vassar's removal over 'harmful consequences' of her bullying, plotting*, THE STATE NEWS (October 22, 2023), <https://statenews.com/article/2023/10/msu-trustee-calls-for-board-chair-rem-a-vassars-removal-over-harmful-consequences-of-her-bullying-plotting>.

² See Trustee Brianna Scott, *Letter to Board of Trustees* (dated October 20, 2023; sent October 22, 2023), <https://acadgov.msu.edu/-/media/assets/academicgovernance/docs/faculty-senate/fs-2023-2024/fs-2023-10-26/2023-10-20-trustee-scott-letter-to-board-re-chair.pdf>.

³ See Alex Walters, *Former MSU trustees join calls for board chair Vassar's resignation*, THE STATE NEWS (October 23, 2023), <https://statenews.com/article/2023/10/former-msu-board-of-trustees-react-to-call-for-vassars-resignation>; Sarah Atwood, *Sen. Debbie Stabenow calls for MSU board chair Rema Vassar to resign*, THE LANSING STATE JOURNAL (October 24, 2023),

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- Whereas*, Interim President Woodruff acknowledged that, “As outlined in a recent trustee letter,” fulfilling her responsibilities as president has “been challenging at times”⁴; and
- Whereas*, Governor Gretchen Whitmer issued a statement⁵ reading, in part, “The allegations in yesterday’s report are deeply concerning. If accurate, it would be a huge breach of the public’s trust. This university has been rocked by scandal after scandal with no clear unified leadership or direction and tragically no accountability either”; and
- Whereas*, MSU is accredited through the Higher Learning Commission and must comply with its Criteria for Accreditation policy, which states, in relevant part, “**2.C.4** The governing board preserves its independence from undue influence on the part of donors, elected officials, ownership interests or other external parties” and “**2.C.5**. The governing board delegates day-to-day management of the institution to the institution’s administration and expects the institution’s faculty to oversee academic matters”⁶; and
- Whereas*, In a statement,⁷ Chairperson Vassar acknowledged flying on a donor’s private plane to sit courtside at an MSU basketball game and failed to address the allegation that she effectively endorsed an external party’s wealth management firm by appearing in an advertisement in her capacity as chairperson; and
- Whereas*, Chairperson Vassar’s statement did not address the allegation that she, “without the knowledge or participation of the interim president,” met “with Lansing officials to pitch moving university colleges and students to a Lansing site”⁸; and
- Resolved*, Chairperson Rema Vassar’s admitted and uncontested actions violate the standards of quality by which the Higher Learning Commission determines whether an institution merits accreditation, and, as a consequence, the Faculty Senate calls on her to resign from the Board of Trustees; and be it further

<https://www.lansingstatejournal.com/story/news/local/campus/2023/10/24/rema-vassar-michigan-state-allegations-debbie-stabenow-brianna-scott/71287890007/>; Governor James Blanchard, *Statement on MSU Board of Trustees* (October 24, 2023), <https://acadgov.msu.edu/resources/commentsfromthefloor/blanchard>.

⁴ See Alex Walters, *MSU interim president Woodruff: working with board chair is challenging*, THE STATE NEWS (October 23, 2023), <https://statenews.com/article/2023/10/msu-interim-president-woodruff-working-with-board-chair-is-challenging>.

⁵ See Samantha May, *MSU trustee calls for chair’s resignation, alleging misuse of power and bullying*, NEWS CHANNEL 3 (October 23, 2023), <https://upnorthlive.com/news/local/michigan-state-university-trustee-board-education-brianna-chair-rema-vassar-resignation-removal-letter-education-whitmer>.

⁶ See Higher Learning Commission, Policy CRRT.B.10.010, <https://www.hlcommission.org/Policies/criteria-and-core-components.html>.

⁷ See Trustee Rema Vassar, *Setting the Record Straight* (October 23, 2023), <https://twitter.com/kennyjacoby/status/1716643542242840929>.

⁸ See Scott, 6.

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MICHIGAN STATE
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- Resolved,* That, if Chairperson Vassar does not resign, the Faculty Senate calls on the Board of Trustees to remove her as chairperson and calls on the governor to begin the process of removing Chairperson Vassar from the Board of Trustees per [MCL 168.293](#); and be it further
- Resolved,* The Faculty Senate will file an official complaint with the Higher Learning Commission regarding these actions and requests that the HLC will provide the trustees with the professional development for which the Faculty Senate has previously called.⁹

⁹ See Faculty Senate Resolution FS2223R02 (September 13, 2022), <https://acadgov.msu.edu/-/media/assets/academicgovernance/docs/faculty-senate/fs-2022-2023/fsresolutions/fs2223r02.pdf>.