

Resignation of Stanford Law Assistant Dean Amidst Judge's Free-Speech Controversy



Tirien Steinbach, the Associate Dean for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion at Stanford Law School, has announced her departure from the institution. The decision came after her involvement in the disruption of a speech delivered by conservative federal judge Stuart Kyle Duncan at the school in March of last year. Stanford Law School Dean, Jenny Martinez, revealed the news in an email addressed to the students and reviewed by Reuters on Thursday. Steinbach's departure comes as she seeks another opportunity after serving nearly two years in her position.

The incident in question occurred on March 9, when Judge Duncan was invited to address the campus chapter of the conservative Federalist Society at Stanford Law School. However, the event was marred by a group of students who interrupted the proceedings, claiming that Judge Duncan had taken positions that jeopardized the rights of LGBTQ people, immigrants, Black voters, women, and other marginalized groups.

A widely circulated video captured the moment when Tirien Steinbach appeared to intervene on behalf of the protestors, stating that the judge's presence was causing pain to some students. Her actions, along with her alleged failure to quell the disruption, sparked controversy and criticism from various quarters, with critics arguing that they amounted to a violation of Stanford's free speech policies. Subsequently, school officials issued an apology to Judge Duncan, and in the aftermath of the incident, Steinbach went on leave from her position.

In the wake of her departure, Dean Martinez acknowledged the impact of the March 9 event on the law school community. Both she and Steinbach expressed a hope for the institution to move forward, healing the divisions that arose from the incident. However, it remains unclear whether Steinbach's departure was voluntary or if she was asked to step down, as she did not respond to requests for comment on the matter.

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Addressing the situation in her announcement, Dean Martinez emphasized that while Steinbach had intended to de-escalate the tense situation during the event, the impact of her statements did not align with her original intentions. The announcement also included expressions of gratitude towards Steinbach for her contributions to the law school during her tenure. Steinbach was credited with spearheading initiatives aimed at fostering inclusivity and outreach to various underrepresented groups within the student body, including older students, veterans, religious groups, conservative groups, first-generation students, students of color, and LGBTQ+ students.

In light of the incident and its aftermath, Judge Stuart Kyle Duncan has not yet responded to requests for comment on Steinbach's departure, leaving his position on the matter unclear.

The controversy surrounding the protest incident raises significant questions about free speech on college campuses and the delicate balance between protecting the right to protest and ensuring an environment conducive to the free exchange of ideas. Like many academic institutions, Stanford Law School faces ongoing challenges in navigating these issues while maintaining a diverse and inclusive learning environment for all students.

As the academic community reflects on this incident and its repercussions, it serves as a reminder of the importance of fostering open dialogue and constructive discourse within educational institutions. The handling of free speech and protest-related matters continues to be a subject of debate across campuses nationwide,

and it remains to be seen how Stanford Law School will address these concerns moving forward.

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