

College defends firing professor after Fox News appearance

http://www.nj.com/essex/index.ssf/2017/06/college_defends_firing_professor_after_fox_news_ap.html

Updated on June 24, 2017 at 4:37 PM Posted on June 24, 2017 at 1:57 PM



Lisa Durden. (Courtesy Lisa Durden)

BY JESSICA MAZZOLA

jmazzola@njadvancemedia.com,
NJ Advance Media for NJ.com

NEWARK -- Weeks after an adjunct professor [was suspended in the wake of a raucous appearance](#) on a Fox News television show, the college's president is speaking out about the school's decision to fire her.

In a statement released Friday night, [newly appointed Essex County College President](#) Anthony Munroe said the school received complaints about adjunct communications professor Lisa Durden after her [June 6 appearance](#) on "Tucker Carlson Tonight." "The college was immediately inundated with feedback from students, faculty and prospective students and their families expressing frustration, concern and even fear that the views expressed by a college employee (with influence over students) would negatively impact their experience on the campus," Munroe said in the statement.

"I fully believe that institutions of higher learning must provide a safe space for students... The character of this institution mandates that we embrace diversity, inclusion, and unity. Racism cannot be fought with more racism."



Fired president sues Essex County College

Essex County College's fired president and legal counsel are suing the school, claiming they were terminated in retaliation for investigating financial issues

The controversy began after [Durden's appearance](#), during which she defended the Black Lives Matter movement's decision to host a Memorial Day celebration in New York City to which only black people were invited. On the show, Durden's comments included, "You white people are angry because you couldn't use your white privilege card to get invited to the Black Lives Matter's all-black Memorial Day Celebration," and "We want to celebrate today. We don't want anybody going against us today."

Durden said that although she did not identify herself as affiliated with Essex County College on the show, she was forced to cancel her classes and abruptly suspended two days later, a process she [likened to a public lynching](#).

In the statement, Munroe acknowledged that Durden's appearance on the show did not mention the college, but said, "her employment with us and potential impact on students required our immediate review into what seemed to have become a very contentious and divisive issue."

Munroe said the school suspended her with pay for six working days, and after a public meeting at which Durden addressed the school's board on June 20, she was fired.

"The college affirms its right to select employees who represent the institution appropriately and are aligned with our mission," Munroe said, while noting it "supports and affirms the right of free speech and independent views and expressions of those views for our faculty and staff."

In a phone interview Friday, Durden said she has received a lot of support from other staff members and students, but compared her experience to a rape victim who is blamed for the crime, and a person who returns from war to a hostile environment. The Newark resident said she thought living in a "black and brown city" and working for a "black and brown college," she would be supported after a trying appearance on Fox News.

"It should be a safe place for me," she said of Essex County College. "I thought when I came home from war, I would be safe." Instead, she said, "I was fired."

Durden's attorney, Leslie Farber, said the two are considering taking legal action over her firing.

"I believe their first suspending and then firing her was directly because of her appearing on the Tucker Carlson TV show, and is a violation of her federal and state constitutional rights to free speech," Farber said.

The public school, Farber said, "can't prevent (employees) from speaking out on something, whether politics or other subjects."

See Durden's entire appearance on the show below.

Jessica Mazzola may be reached at jmazzola@njadvancemedia.com. Follow her on Twitter [@JessMazzola](#). Find [NJ.com](#) on Facebook.