



March 29, 2017

Contact: Chief Andrew Powers, Ohio University Police Department
Email: powersa@ohio.edu

STATEMENT FROM CHIEF POWERS ON BAKER CENTER ARRESTS AND VERDICT

ATHENS, Ohio – On February 1, 2017 officers from my department, at my direction, arrested 70 people for refusing to leave the rotunda of Baker Center following repeated attempts to relocate them and numerous warnings to leave. My decision was based on my firsthand observation of conditions I deemed unsafe and disruptive. In accordance with due process, the arrests were prosecuted in Athens Municipal Court; the first case to be presented at trial was heard on March 20. On March 27, the Athens Municipal Judge found the defendant not guilty of the criminal trespass offense with which he was charged. Although I still believe the February 1 gathering had become unsafe and that our response was appropriate, I respect the decision of the Judge. Out of fairness to the other similarly situated defendants, I have asked the Athens City Prosecutor's office to dismiss the remaining charges related to the February 1 demonstration. The final decision to do so rests with the Prosecutor's office.

My department remains committed to the rule of law and the protection of Constitutional rights. To that end, I look forward to working with senior leadership of the University to review our institutional policies and procedures to ensure they protect everyone's First Amendment rights, while also providing law enforcement with the tools we need to effectively manage public events and keep our community safe.

I would like to thank our law enforcement partners at the Athens Police Department and the Ohio State Highway Patrol for the assistance they provided on February 1. I commend all of the officers and troopers from every agency present that night for the professionalism with which they conducted themselves. I would also like to thank Athens City Prosecutor Tracy Meek and her staff for their diligent work on these cases. Most importantly, I am grateful we live in a country that values due process and has safe, civil means for reviewing and resolving the actions of government.

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