

May 3, 2019

The Honorable Glen Casada
Speaker of the Tennessee House of Representatives
425 5th Avenue North
Suite 600 Cordell Hull Bldg.
Nashville, TN 37243



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Dear Speaker Casada,

I am writing you on behalf of the ACLU of Tennessee's more than 32,000 members and supporters across the state to urge you to speak out against racism in Tennessee government.

As you clearly understand, you hold one of the most powerful positions in our state. Your actions on a day-to-day basis contribute to and shape the climate and culture of this state, as do those of people with senior roles on your staff. With great power comes great responsibility.

When NewsChannel 5 released screenshots of texts sent by your chief of staff, Cade Cothren, stating "Call him thug n----" and "Black people are idiots," your response was to "question the veracity of their entire story" and to state "I've known Cade Cothren for nearly a decade, and I've never known him to act in a manner in which these emails and texts falsely portray him."

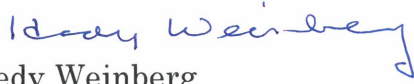
Such a response is at best perplexing given the actual screenshots of these words bearing Cothren's initials and showing that you received one of his texts, as well as the fact that Cothren has not denied that the texts were his. His words are all too clear.

You had an opportunity in this moment to denounce racism in Tennessee and the use of racist language by people who are part of Tennessee government. You had the opportunity to attempt to stem the damage and pain comments like this inflict on people of color in our state, particularly when such messages are broadcast by people in some of the highest positions of power in our state government. You had the opportunity to use your platform to say that you will attempt to represent all Tennesseans. You failed to do so.

Your absence of leadership in this moment is deeply troubling and we call upon you to recognize the impact that your defense of racism has on our state, on the people who live here, and on the national perception of Tennessee.

We call on you to do the right thing in this moment by taking action to denounce racism and condemn these racist comments. We expect you to hold your office and those who advise you to the highest standards. Your words and your actions matter.

Sincerely,



Hedy Weinberg
Executive Director

