

Medical Students for Choice

Chapter Guidelines

Dealing with Opposition

Medical Students for Choice is committed to the safety of our members. On occasion, an MSFC member or chapter may experience threats or harassment due to the controversial nature of our work. These guidelines are designed to give you steps you may follow to better ensure your safety and the safety of your chapter's members.

Threats

Threats can come in physical, verbal, or written form. Any communication is deemed a "threat" if a reasonable person would interpret the communication as an intention to create the fear of bodily harm. Threats are a rare experience for our MSFC chapters but should be taken seriously if they occur. The guidelines below will give you step-by-step instructions for responding to a threat.

Harassment

Harassment by mail, email or in person is the most common type of potential safety issue faced by our chapter leaders. Harassment can include threats, but are most often communications or actions that hinder your efforts by forcing you to turn your energies elsewhere. Examples of harassment include:

- Tearing down or defacing flyers posted to inform your fellow students of an MSFC-sponsored event or meeting
- Nasty emails on your chapter's listserv or personally to chapter members.
- Verbal argumentative behavior at an MSFC event (heckling).

Guidelines for Responding to Threats or Harassment

If you or any member of your chapter is threatened, you should notify your campus security immediately.

Document the Incident

It is important that you keep a careful record of any incident involving threats or harassment to establish a pattern for future consideration by your school's administration or security office.

- If the incident occurs at a meeting or event, have those MSFC members who witnessed the incident write up a description of the event and save the reports for campus security. Include the name of the person causing the problem, the general content of the threat or harassing comment, and any other elements of the incident (such as the number of persons involved) that may bear on an assessment of the seriousness of the incident.
- If the incident is by voicemail or email, save the harassing or threatening message and show to campus security.

Alert Campus Authorities to the Problem

Once you have documented the incident, you should ensure that others, including those in positions of authority on your campus, know about the incident. There are two reasons for this: a) it ensures that

there is a record of the incident if additional incidents occur and an official response is appropriate, and
b) it provides a context for law enforcement if an incident of harassment escalates to a threatening situation.

Alert your Chapter Members to the Incident

Because any of your chapter members may be exposed to threats or harassment from the same group or individual, officially informing chapter members of the incident is important.

Notify MSFC HQ

MSFC HQ maintains a record of campus incidents and, if the situation is more serious, can arrange for private security consulting for any member of your chapter that may feel threatened.

Special Note on Picketing: Picketing is a constitutionally protected activity and is not considered to be either a threat or harassment. There are legal parameters around picketing activity in some cities, however, so it would be useful for you to be aware of an “bubble zone” legislation in your town or city that requires picketers to maintain a certain distance. Picketers must generally stay on public property, so they may not be permitted to picket on your campus.