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P e d e R e a L a

Thank you, Chair Weatherford. First, let me reiterate my condemnation of the Hamas attacks, and express my deep concern for all innocent civilians who are affected by this tragedy.

I also want to acknowledge that, for those in our community who have deep ties to Israel and the Middle East, these events, and the rhetoric surrounding them, continue to be a source of pain, fear, sadness, and anxiety. We recognize that passionately held beliefs associated with the conflict in the Middle East inevitably lead to opinions and ideas expressed that upset some members of our community and raise questions about how such speech can be permitted.

As a public institution, USF is obligated by the First Amendment to permit such speech and peaceful assembly, subject only to reasonable limits upon the time, place, and manner within which the assembly and speech take place. We are committed to safeguarding the First Amendment rights of all members of our community, while at the same time making clear that the groups and individuals exercising those rights do not speak for our university and USF does not endorse the content of their speech.

While the First Amendment may prevent the university from mandating civility and respect in all instances, it is our firm expectation that all members of the USF community always exhibit these qualities in their interactions. This expectation underscores our collective dedication to upholding the core values that define our institution.

To be explicitly clear, the safety of the USF community is our highest priority. Violence and discrimination, including harassment and intimidation, will not be tolerated on our campuses. Incidents of antisemitism, Islamophobia, hatred, and bigotry have no place in our society. The university has strict policies designed to combat all of these, and we remain committed to enforcing all laws and policies to swiftly address any violations we identify on our campuses. We strongly encourage anyone who experiences or witnesses such behavior to report it to the USF Police Department or the appropriate university department for immediate review.

I want to expand on the steps we are taking to keep our campuses safe and address the university's mission as a public institution and our obligations under the First Amendment.

As part of our commitment to safety, there has been and will continue to be an increase in the visibility of USF police officers on campus, including a dedicated presence near student religious organizations' facilities 24 hours a day. Our strong partnerships with other local law enforcement agencies also provide an additional layer of security. Our teams in Student Success, in partnership with USF Police, are working diligently to ensure that all gatherings remain peaceful, do not disrupt academic experiences and university operations, and do not violate university policies or any laws.

I wish to express my gratitude to members of the Student Success team, USFPD, and countless others who play a role in keeping our campuses safe, as well as to our students, faculty and staff — the vast majority of whom have conducted themselves in a civil