

Katherine Oung

ACP REPORTER OF THE YEAR APPLICATION PORTFOLIO

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Katherine Oung

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EDUCATION

Vanderbilt University

Bachelor of Arts in Computer Science and Political Science, Data Science Minor

• College of Arts & Science Honors Scholar | Dean's List

• John Seigenthaler Scholarship: 4-year full-tuition award given to one Vanderbilt applicant yearly for journalism, public policy merit

Nashville, TN

August 2021-May 2025

RESEARCH & JOURNALISM

Dow Jones News Fund, The Indianapolis Star

Incoming Data Journalism Intern

• Work in Investigations staff on ongoing long-form projects, utilizing Python, Tableau, Datawrapper

• Pitch and produce data journalism personal project

Indianapolis, IL

June 2023-August 2023

The Vanderbilt Hustler Student Newspaper

Newsroom Operations Director, Data & Digital Director

• Serve in advisory role to EIC and Managing Editor on copyright/legal/workplace disputes and editorial decisions

• Lead section of 10 staffers to produce data-driven features stories and visualizations embedded into other sections; track site analytics; create custom interactives and web design for the website

Nashville, TN

May 2023-Present

Managing Editor

May 2022-May 2023

• Edit and publish ~30 articles per week; Alongside Editor-In-Chief, create programming, lead the editorial board; started and hired personnel for new Data, Podcasts, and Magazine sections

• Recruit and train 90 staffers per semester; host General Training and Datawrapper/coding training session

Deputy News Editor

Nov 2021-May 2022

• Oversee deadlines, edit articles, and provide news training, head Ethnic and Racial Identity Groups beat

Data Science Institute at Vanderbilt University, Nashville Arts and Business Council

Nashville, TN

Code Contributor Intern

Jan 2023-Present

• Utilize Python, R, R Shiny to create an interactive dashboard displaying survey results about music business in Nashville

• Participate in agile sprint methodology in 5-person team

Vanderbilt Research on Conflict and Collective Action Lab

Nashville, TN

Research Assistant

August 2022-Present

• Climate Protest Data team (Prof. Cassy Dorff) and Reducing Prejudice Against Refugees Data team (Prof. Jennifer Larson)

• Collect, organize, visualize data using Python, R, transformers, Github

Vanderbilt Latin American Public Opinion Project Lab

Nashville, TN

Research Fellow

Jan 2022-August 2022

• Audit reports using Stata and R; proofread lab reports; create current events memos for LAC countries

• Contribute to LAPOP graphic design, website development, branding

• Publish *Insights* report under Prof. Elizabeth Zechmeister, utilizing Stata and R

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

American Civil Liberties Union of Florida

West Palm Beach, FL (Remote)

Immigrant Rights Intern

Jan 2021-June 2021

• Researched policy, met with commissioners, ran community events, recruited volunteers to pass legislation at the local/state level

Office of Congresswoman Lois Frankel

Boca Raton, FL; Washington D.C. (Remote)

District & D.C. Office Intern

Sept 2019-August 2020

• Attended briefings, researched bills, ran community events, corresponded with constituents, collected press clips

FREELANCE WORK

• **Vox** [Community fridges are lifelines for the neighborhoods they serve](#)

• **Vox** [The best \\$96 I ever spent: A Keurig to show my mom I love her; Vox QuickHits Podcast Recording](#)

• **The New York Times** [Opinion: Coronavirus racism infected my high school](#)

• **Ms. Magazine** [High schools in 41 states aren't required to teach ethnic studies](#)

• **Ms. Magazine** [Meet the teen feminist leading the fight for young women's reproductive rights](#)

• **Teen Vogue** [4 Asian-American Women Who Changed History](#)

• **The Trace** [Since Parkland](#)

Honors: CMA Pinnacle 1st Place Breaking News Coverage (2022), ACP Pacemaker 3rd Place Diversity Equity Inclusion Package (2022), Florida Scholastic Press Association Designer of the Year (2021), New York Times Connections Contest Runner-Up (2020)

Skills: Python, Java, R, Stata, Datawrapper, Github, Microsoft Office; Adobe Creative Cloud, Final Cut Pro; Mandarin Chinese

Memberships: Vanderbilt Prison Project, Prison Journalism Project, Young Writer's Initiative Mentor

Pamphlets left around campus accuse Vanderbilt of ‘fascism’ due to VUMC’s transgender health care

The university is in the process of removing the pamphlets, which criticize Vanderbilt’s freedom of speech policies and include an image of Adolf Hitler.



Pamphlets outside the lobby of Zeppos College, as photographed on Dec. 6, 2022. (Hustler Staff/Katherine Oung)

KATHERINE OUNG, Managing Editor
 DECEMBER 7, 2022

Stacks of newspaper-style pamphlets condemning the university’s freedom of speech policies and VUMC’s transgender health clinic were left on the porches of houses in the West End Neighborhood, in the Zeppos College lobby, outside Morgan House and in the Starbucks on West End Avenue on the morning of Dec. 6.

The pamphlets were left by unknown individuals and are attributed to “America Hating Universities,” a campaign of the David Horowitz Freedom Center, a self-identified conservative and anti-Islam nonprofit organization based in California that “combats the radical left.” The pamphlets accuse Vanderbilt and peer institutions of “on campus fascism” and include an image of and quote from Adolf Hitler.

“Comparing anything that happens on our campus—or the other U.S. universities mentioned in the pamphlet—with the regime that committed these atrocities, is an insult to the victims of Nazism.”

— Alexander Joskowitz

In a Dec. 7 press release sent to The Hustler, Lonny Leitner, director of special programs at the David Horowitz Freedom Center, stated that the organization engaged in a “stealth campaign” to distribute 2,500 copies of the pamphlet across campus.

In addition to the aforementioned locations, the press release stated that the pamphlets were dropped off in “classroom buildings, dining facilities, student centers and distribution boxes” for The Hustler. However, there are no distribution racks specific to The Hustler on campus, as it has not been published in print since 2015. Furthermore, distribution racks of Vanderbilt Student Communications—of which The Hustler is a part—are not permitted to be used by external publications without VSC’s approval. The Hustler was unable to independently verify the information in the press release.

A university representative stated in a Dec. 6 email to The Hustler that the university is in the process of collecting and removing the pamphlets because they violate Vanderbilt’s [Communication and Promotion](#) and [Freedom of Expression](#) policies. The representative added that the university is also “reviewing the documents” to determine who may have distributed them.

Although Vanderbilt and VUMC are [legally separate entities](#), the pamphlets allege that the gender-affirming care provided by the VUMC contributes to Vanderbilt University being “fascist.” Vanderbilt and [Nashville](#) have received national attention after conservative political commentator Matt Walsh criticized the VUMC’s transgender health clinic and held a rally in support of this view. Gov. Bill Lee subsequently [called for an investigation](#) of the clinic’s pediatric gender-affirming healthcare services on Sept. 21.

The pamphlets further claim that Vanderbilt is stifling conservative free speech due to its Equity, Diversity and Inclusion [policies](#) and student protest [guidelines](#) delineated in the [Student Handbook](#). They do not cite specific examples of community members’ speech being curtailed. The pamphlets also feature an image and quote from Adolf Hitler digitally superimposed in front of an image of Stambaugh House, with quotes from a VUMC doctor and the [Vanderbilt Community Creed](#) bordering the graphic.

Professor of Jewish studies Alexander Joskowitz deemed the pamphlets’ comparison of the university to fascism and Nazism to be inaccurate and offensive.

“It is not acceptable to invoke Nazism, a genocidal regime, just to grab attention for your agenda,” Joskowitz said in an email to The Hustler. “Comparing anything that happens on our campus—or the other U.S. universities mentioned in the pamphlet—with the regime that committed these atrocities, is an insult to the victims of Nazism.”

President of Vanderbilt’s Tau chapter of Alpha Epsilon Pi fraternity and VSG Vice President Ari Sasson, a junior, stated that he saw a stack of the pamphlets on the patio of the AEPI house, his place of residence, at approximately 11 a.m. CST on Dec. 6. Sasson also reported seeing stacks of the same pamphlets in front of “nearly every house” in the West End Neighborhood that morning, including those of Vanderbilt’s chapters of Zeta Beta Tau, Zeta Tau Alpha, Pi Beta Phi and Alpha Tau Omega, as well as those of the National Pan-Hellenic Council and the [Multicultural Community Space](#).



Pamphlets outside the National Pan-Hellenic Council house, as photographed on Dec. 6, 2022. (Photo courtesy of Ari Sasson)

Pan-Hellenic Council President Jenn Kong, NPHC President Jaren Pierre and Interfraternity Council President Ben Powdermaker—all seniors—confirmed that pamphlets were dropped off at the house(s) of their organizations. Kong and Pierre condemned the messages in the pamphlets. Sasson and Pierre said they disposed of pamphlets that they found in the West End Neighborhood.

“We are a council that promotes unity, love, and support,” Pierre said in a message to The Hustler.

Senior Safa Shahzad, president of the Multicultural Leadership Council—which conducts programming in the MCS—said the MLC does not condone the pamphlets and remains steadfast in its [support](#) of transgender healthcare.

“The picture of Hitler is extremely disturbing, as the image of a racist, antisemitic, ableist, homophobic figure being left outside the MCS stands against everything we stand for,” Shahzad said. “It is disgusting that students and organizations are being targeted.”

Sasson stated that seeing this imagery also immediately generated concern for him, citing a “sense of fear” among the Vanderbilt Jewish community, especially in light of [heightened antisemitism](#) across the country this fall. In August, antisemitic fliers were left on the [driveways](#) of a West Nashville neighborhood. Prominent rapper Ye has also come under fire for making numerous antisemitic and otherwise discriminatory remarks, and Vanderbilt Football’s defensive backs coach Dan Jackson [stepped back](#) from the football program in November after [supporting Ye](#) on social media.

Sasson said he believes the creators of the pamphlet utilized the imagery of Hitler for shock value, which he found to be problematic.

“It definitely hit very close to home,” Sasson said. “Let’s assume that this newspaper really only cares about ‘fascism.’ ... I want to give the authors and the distributors of this the benefit of the doubt they’re not necessarily inciting antisemitism, but you can’t use Hitler in a publication and expect it to be received well by the Jewish community.”



Conservative activist Chris Elston protesting outside of Band, as photographed on Nov. 8, 2022. (Hustler Multimedia/Nikita Rohila)

Sasson and Hidden ‘Dores President Indu Kumar, a junior, expressed concern about the safety of Vanderbilt’s LGBTQ+ community amid the presence of non-Vanderbilt affiliated protestors and printed materials being found on campus.

On Nov. 8, Canadian conservative activist Chris Elston, known as “Billboard Chris,” traveled to Nashville to stand in front of the Monroe Carell Jr. Children’s Hospital and Rand Wall, attempting to speak with passersby about his opposition to gender-affirming care. Sasson claimed Elston was “intimidating” transgender students while he was on campus. In their Dec. 6 email to The Hustler, the university representative stated that non-affiliated persons are “generally not permitted” to demonstrate on campus and are asked to move to a public space if found to be doing so.

In response to the pamphlets’ distribution, Sasson suggested that the university should increase police presence on campus and further acknowledge the public’s perception of the VUMC and Vanderbilt University as connected, despite being separate legal entities.

“The fact is, the first two words in the medical center’s name is Vanderbilt University. A random person is not going to understand that there’s a difference,” Sasson said. “The word Vanderbilt means the entire Vanderbilt community regardless of what that the legal papers and the financial records say.”

“If there’s anyone who needs their voices heard, it’s those advocating for change, not those who claim their prejudiced and harmful beliefs are being attacked in an imaginary culture war.”

— Indu Kumar

Kumar stated that the university should provide LGBTQ+ students with the option to request safety escorts and transportation to LGBTQ+-related events on and off campus, as well as do more to protect the free speech rights of student protestors.

“Students who wish to change campus policy in a positive manner end up being [harrassed](#) and [punished](#) by the school,” Kumar said. “If there’s anyone who needs their voices heard, it’s those advocating for change, not those who claim their prejudiced and harmful beliefs are being attacked in an imaginary culture war.”

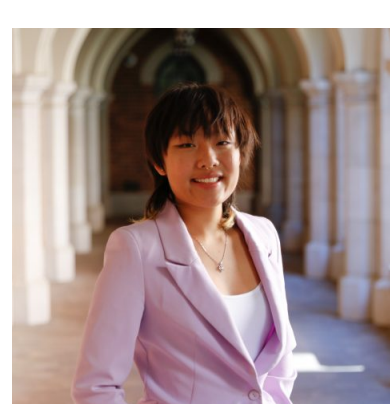
The Vanderbilt College Republicans and the Vanderbilt Lambda Association did not immediately respond to The Hustler’s requests for comments.

Rachael Perrotta contributed reporting to this piece.

[greek life](#) [LGBT](#) [Multicultural Community Space](#) [vanderbilt university medical center](#) [VUMC](#)

Leave a comment

About the Contributors



Katherine Oung, Newsroom Operations, Data and Digital Director
 Katherine Oung (25) is majoring in political science and computer science and minoring in data science in the College of Arts and Science. They are from West Palm Beach, Fla., and were previously Deputy News Editor and Managing Editor. Katherine enjoys working on freelance journalism and making incredibly specific Spotify playlists. They can be reached at katherine.oung@vanderbilt.edu.



Brina Ratangee, News Editor
 Brina Ratangee (24) is a student in the College of Arts and Science planning to major in medicine, health & society and neuroscience. When not writing for The Hustler, she enjoys solving trivia/crosswords, playing the violin and spending time with friends. You can reach her at brina.a.ratangee@vanderbilt.edu.



Nikita Rohila, Deputy Social Media Director
 Nikita Rohila (25) is from a small town in Arkansas and is majoring in psychology and medicine, health and society in the College of Arts and Science. During her free time, she enjoys roaming around the city and getting cinematic-style shots for her photography account! You can reach her at nikita.s.rohila@vanderbilt.edu.

TRENDING

- Tennessee gun laws: What you need to know
- Record-low 5.6% of applicants admitted to Class of 2027, admission rates continue to decline
- Recruiting: Vanderbilt secures four-star Notre Dame transfer Ven-Allen Lubin
- Tyler Childers makes an eccentric return with ‘Can I Take my Hounds to Heaven’
- Together again, together forever in ‘Adventure Time: Distant Lands’
- From Nashville M Street chef to ‘Chopped’ champion: Jordan Arcuri
- Vanderbilt’s newest band, The Delhamen, discuss their debut self-titled EP
- Eat the Rich: How an 18th Century Phrase has Made a Comeback
- Unpacking the white sneaker trend
- Local CVS, Kroger faces Aderall shortage, students report inability to access medication

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Tweets from @VandyHustler

Vanderbilt Hustler @VandyHustler · May 1
 Relive the exciting performances at Prites of Spring 2023 from the likes of Dayglow and ASAP Ferg, all of whom transformed Alumni Lawn to a destination concert spot in Music City

FOLLOW HUSTLER SPORTS

Tweets from @vuhustlersports

Vandy Hustler Sports @vuhustlersports · 5h
 Through injuries and ineligibilities, Vanderbilt Men’s Tennis limped all the way to the finals of the inaugural Universal Tennis NIT.

Recap by: @Jay_Feat

vanderbilthustler.com
 Give me liberty and give me death: Men’s Tennis loses to Liberty in NIT ...

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Vandy Hustler Sports



Protestors chant as legislators walk into the House chamber, as photographed on April 6, 2023. (Hustler Staff/Katherine Oung) ([KATHERINE OUNG](#))

Best of **SNO**

‘The nation is watching’: Students lead protests as Rep. Justin Jones and Rep. Justin Pearson are expelled

A Republican supermajority voted on the removal of “Tennessee Three” over their involvement in a gun violence protest in the wake of the Covenant School shooting.

APRIL 7, 2023

The Tennessee House of Representatives took the unprecedented move of expelling Rep. Justin Jones (D – Nashville), a Vanderbilt Divinity School student, and Rep. Justin Pearson (D – Memphis) — the body’s two youngest Black lawmakers. The resolutions passed in a party-line vote on April 6, while a resolution to expel Rep. Gloria Johnson (D – Knoxville) failed by one vote.

These resolutions are the first pieces of legislation the Tennessee state government has passed in light of the mass shooting that killed three 9-year-olds and three faculty members at The Covenant School 10 days prior.

During a House session on March 30, the three lawmakers called for gun violence reform at the podium without being recognized by Speaker Cameron Sexton (R), a violation of House rules.

“We called for you all to ban assault weapons, and you respond with an assault on democracy,” Jones said during his hearing. “If it can happen in Tennessee, it’s coming to your state next. That is why the nation is watching us.”

The rotunda filled with hundreds of protestors — including Vanderbilt students and faculty — and state troopers as the House session geared up to begin at 9 a.m. CDT.

March for Our Lives organizers junior Brynn Jones and first-year Ezri Tyler organized a coalition of over 50 college and high school students to protest for the entire 10-hour House session. Other members of the public engaged in largely-silent demonstrations in the gallery, where they could observe the House proceedings.

In an interview with *The Hustler*, Pearson commended the persistence of student organizers.

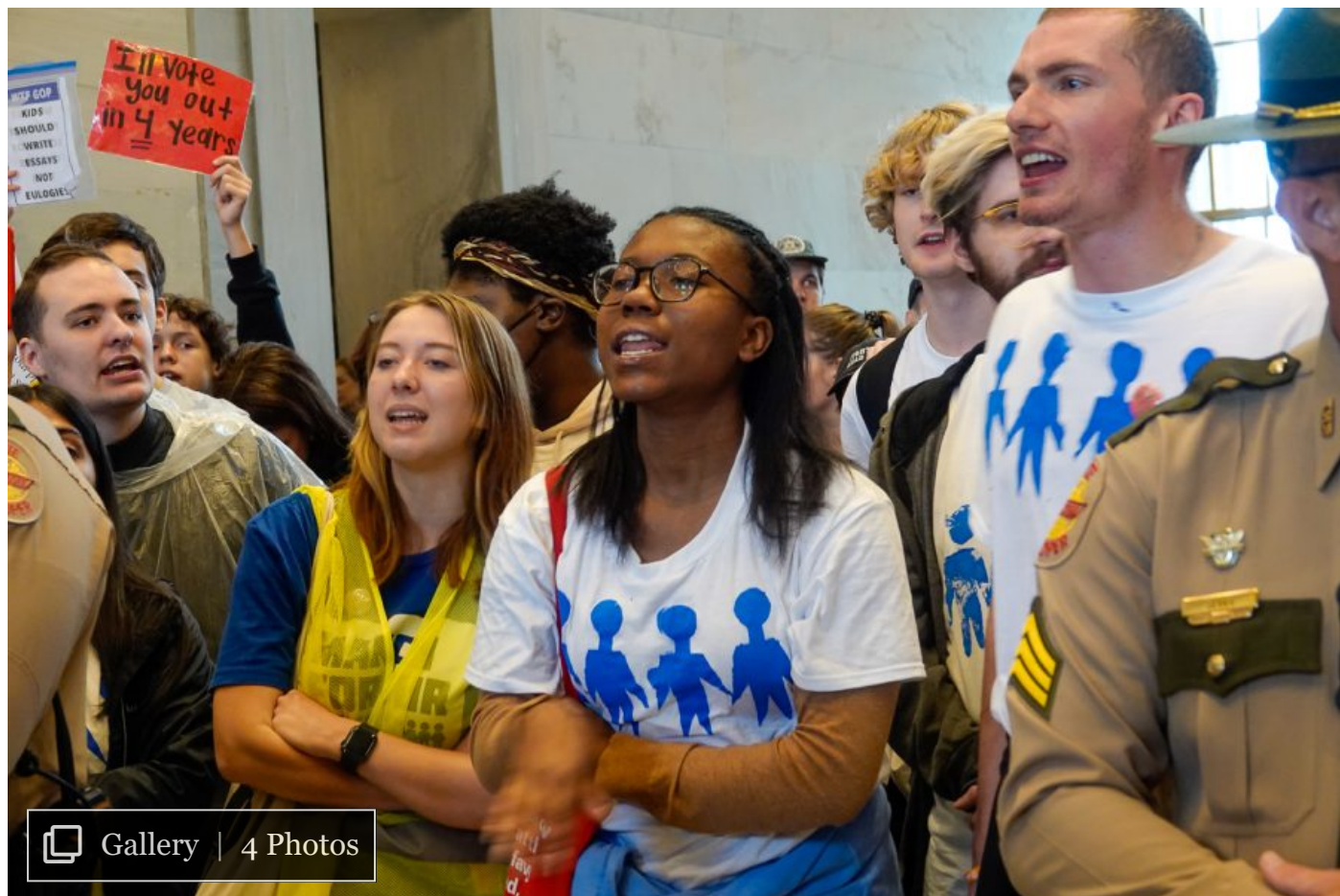
“We create a more just society because we choose to work for it, to fight for it, to get expelled for it,” Pearson said. “It is inspiring and motivating to see so many young people — college students and other young people in high school, middle school and elementary school — who are saying that we can be a better state than we currently are.”

Thousands of people opposing the expulsions also flooded the capitol steps and Legislative Plaza Three despite rainy weather. When Jones, Johnson and Pearson passed by — their hands linked — the crowd erupted into cheers of “We stand with the Tennessee Three.”

“This expulsion is such a mark of facism. It’s so scary and sets a dangerous precedent,” sophomore Lexi Abrams said about her reason for protesting at the House.

President Joe Biden, President Barack Obama and the ACLU of Tennessee were among those who condemned the expulsion online. Vice President Kamala Harris attended a community event in support of the Tennessee Three at Fisk University — Jones’s alma mater — today. The Tennessee House’s Republican Caucus released a statement about the expulsion later that

night, calling it a “sad day for Tennessee” and stating that it felt the removal was “the only path forward.”



Protestors chant and hold up signs in the rotunda, as photographed on April 6, 2023. (Hustler Staff/Katherine Oung)

From a [MFOL walkout](#) on April 3 to protests during an April 5 hearing of a bill that would arm K-12 teachers, students like Jones, Tyler and Abrams have advocated for gun reform at the capitol [almost every day](#) since the Covenant School shooting.

“Our legislature needs to be more responsive to young people and to young adults, and to youth,” Pearson continued. “It is being run by people who are nearing retirement and are not interested in elevating the issues of our communities, and the issues that matter to young people.”

What happens after expulsion?

Special elections will be held to fill Jones’s and Johnson’s seats, and local city councils can decide to appoint an interim representative until the election is held. Expelled members can be reinstated as interim representatives and rerun for their position. Members also cannot be expelled for the same offense multiple times.

The Metro Nashville City Council has scheduled an interim appointment vote for April 10, with a majority of members [pledging on social media](#) that they would vote for Jones. A simple majority is needed. Several members of the Shelby County Commission have also [stated](#) they

would reappoint Pearson but an interim appointment vote has not been scheduled yet.

“We keep fighting,” Pearson told *The Hustler*. “We were fighting for justice before we were elected; we’ll fight for justice after we’re expelled.”

House proceedings

The expulsion of Jones and Pearson marks the third time since the Civil War era that elected members of the Tennessee House have been removed — and the first time expulsion has been motivated by a rule infraction rather than a crime.

Representatives were expelled in 2016 for allegations of sexual misconduct from over 22 women and in 1980 for accepting a \$1,000 bribe from a sheriff. In 1866, six House members were expelled for trying to prevent Tennessee from ratifying the 14th Amendment to provide citizenship to former slaves.

A two-thirds majority is needed to pass an expulsion resolution in the Tennessee House. The Republican supermajority voted 72-25 to remove Jones and 69-26 to remove Pearson. Seven Republicans broke from party lines in the vote to expel Johnson, putting her in the clear by one vote at 65-30.

Johnson told media that the reason that she survived the expulsion vote “might have to do with the color of our skin.” Sexton and other Republicans later [denied](#) that race factored into the votes.



Rep Justin Jones hugs a supporter in the gallery after being expelled, as photographed on April 6, 2023. (Hustler Staff/Katherine Oung)

The House considered each of the Tennessee Three's actions in separate expulsion resolutions, which were placed in the "unfinished business" section at the end of the session calendar, starting with Jones.

The three lawmakers, and attorneys if they had them, were each given 20 minutes to speak during their hearings. Then, members of the House had the opportunity to question each lawmaker in cross-examination. Expulsion occurred effective immediately, meaning Jones could not vote on the resolutions to expel Johnson or Pearson.

Republican representatives argued that the three lawmakers showed disrespect for democratic process and silenced the voices of other House members by speaking out of order.

"What we're doing today is we are upholding our Constitution. We are protecting the integrity of this body," Bulso said. Bulso also accused Jones of "mutiny."

Jones criticized the supermajority for attempting to strip Tennesseans of their elected representation. The Tennessee Three represent a total of about 210,000 constituents in some of the [most racially diverse](#) districts.

"For long, this body — drunk with power — has modeled for the world what we know as nothing less than authoritarianism, and today is the climax of that behavior," Jones said.

Often, when Jones paused between sentences, songs and chants from protestors from the rotunda could be heard from behind the chamber's doors. Jones emphasized the peaceful nature of the demonstration which he participated in on March 30. He claimed his actions that day resulted from frustration at repeated instances of Sexton cutting off Democratic lawmaker's speaking time, as well as the legislature's unwillingness to consider gun reform legislation. He also referenced many [Republican lawmaker's ties](#) to the gun lobby

"Last Thursday, when thousands gathered here, [Republicans] tried to silence members from talking about the issue of gun violence because they were afraid that a conversation would remind people that there is complicity in this body for what happened at Covenant," Jones said.

Johnson's legal counsel spoke for her during opening remarks, while she provided responses to cross-examination herself. Johnson's team disputed the resolution's claims that Johnson broke House rules, stating that she did not speak at the podium while the group demonstrated and brought a bullhorn into the building. Johnson also recalled being a teacher at Central High School in Knoxville when a student was shot and killed.

"Sometimes, in order to be heard, in order to bring attention to an issue that is killing children and killing people in our communities, sometimes you have to take a stand," Johnson said. "And that's what we did."

Pearson began and ended his remarks with references to his faith. He argued Republicans

should acknowledge that America was a country “built by protest” and that new lawmakers were not properly informed of House rules.

During each of the Tennessee Three’s closing remarks, the House Democratic Caucus gathered behind them at the podium in a show of support.


“Resurrection is a promise, and it is a prophecy. It’s a prophecy that came out of the cotton fields. It’s a prophecy that came out of the lynching tree,” Pearson said before the vote for his expulsion. “I’ve still got hope, because I know we are still here, and we will never quit.”

MFOL die-in

After the House adjourned, the Tennessee Three re-entered the rotunda, again with their arms linked. As legislators and observers streamed out of the chamber, MFOL activists gathered for a 14 minute “die-in” in memory of the victims of The Covenant School shooting. When the shooter killed six last Monday, [152 rounds](#) were fired in 14 minutes.

“I participated in the die-in to make the extremist right-wing legislators look at the consequences of their inactions in the face,” first-year Sam Schulman said. “I think it showed the world that people, especially students, aren’t gonna stop fighting for justice for victims of gun violence.”



 Gallery | 5 Photos

Onlookers watch a student die-in protest, as photographed on April 6, 2023. (Hustler Staff/Katherine Oung)

The Tennessee Three later attended a press conference organized by MFOL activists featuring student and community speakers from organizations like the Tennessee Immigrant & Refugee Rights Coalition.

“The reason we’re out here is because they [the Tennessee Three] stood with us, and we are standing with them,” Tyler said during the press conference. “Something so unique and so powerful about these representatives is they have encouraged young people to find their voices in their own communities.”

[View Comments \(1\)](#)



Tennessee gun laws: What you need to know

Pressure mounts for the Republican supermajority to enact “red flag” laws and school safety measures following the Covenant School shooting.



The Tennessee Capitol building on a rainy day, as photographed on April 6, 2023. (Hustler Staff/Katherine Oung)

KATHERINE OUNG, Managing Editor on APRIL 17, 2023

In the wake of the [Covenant School shooting](#) that killed three students and three staff members, [student activists](#), [Vanderbilt community members](#) and [elected leaders](#) have placed renewed attention on Tennessee’s gun laws — which have become looser in recent years.

Despite a record of opposing gun control measures, Gov. Bill Lee (R) [signed an executive order](#) on April 11 strengthening Tennessee’s background check process for licensed firearm dealers. Guns can still be acquired legally in Tennessee through private sellers without a background check.

“In our state, we have already been setting all records for the number of kids getting shot, mass shootings and shootings that don’t make the news. [The Covenant School shooting] is part of a bigger trend.”

— Prof. Jonathan Metzl

In the EO, Lee also called for state legislators to pass a law that would give authorities the ability to take guns from people that a court deems a threat to themselves or others — often referred to as a “red flag” law. Following Lee’s April 11 EO, House Speaker Cameron Sexton (R) and Lt. Gov. Randy McNally (R) both [expressed openness](#) to considering a red flag law. However, the Delayed Bills Committee voted to not approve a red flag bill ([SB 1564](#)) that Democrats filed on April 5.

Lee also proposed a package of school safety policies and additional funding for such initiatives in the Fiscal Year 2024 budget.

According to the most recently released CDC data from 2020, Tennessee has the 10th highest rate of gun deaths in the country — 56% higher than the national average. That same year, firearms became the [No. 1 cause of death](#) for youth in the U.S. and has remained since then.

Firearm death rates by state

Tennessee ranks 10th in the nation for highest number of deaths by firearm per 100,000 people, as of 2020.

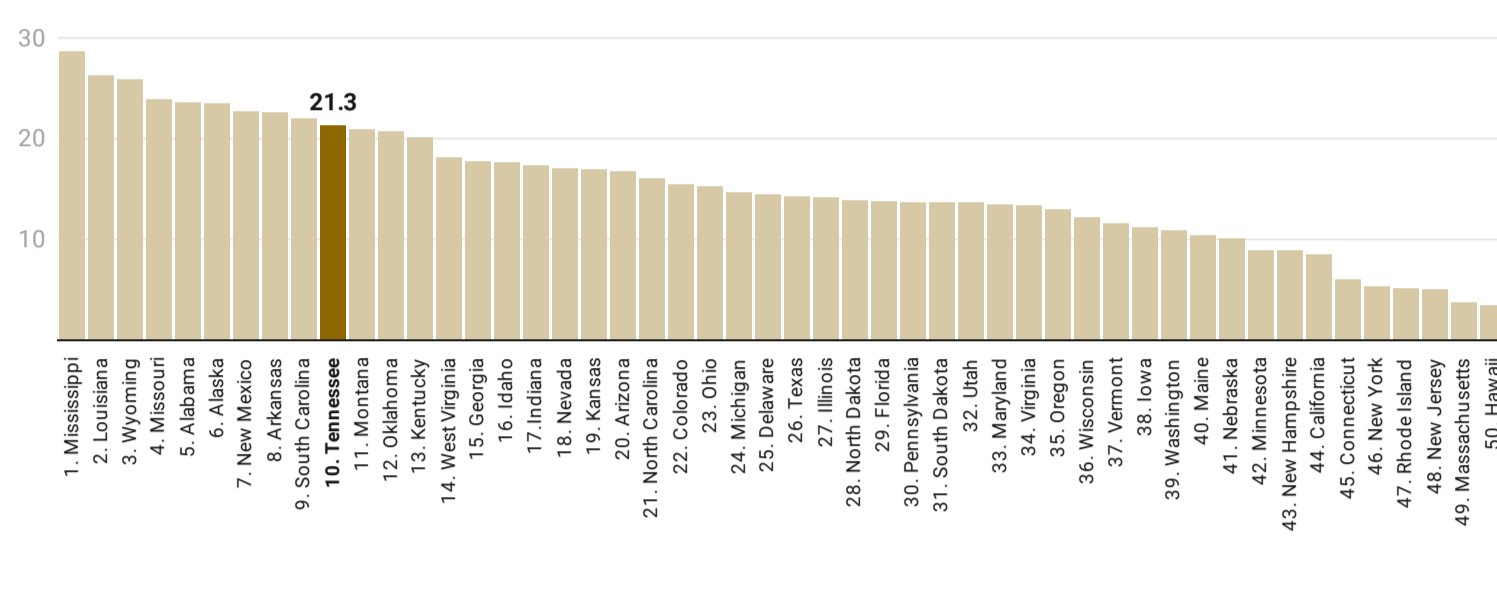


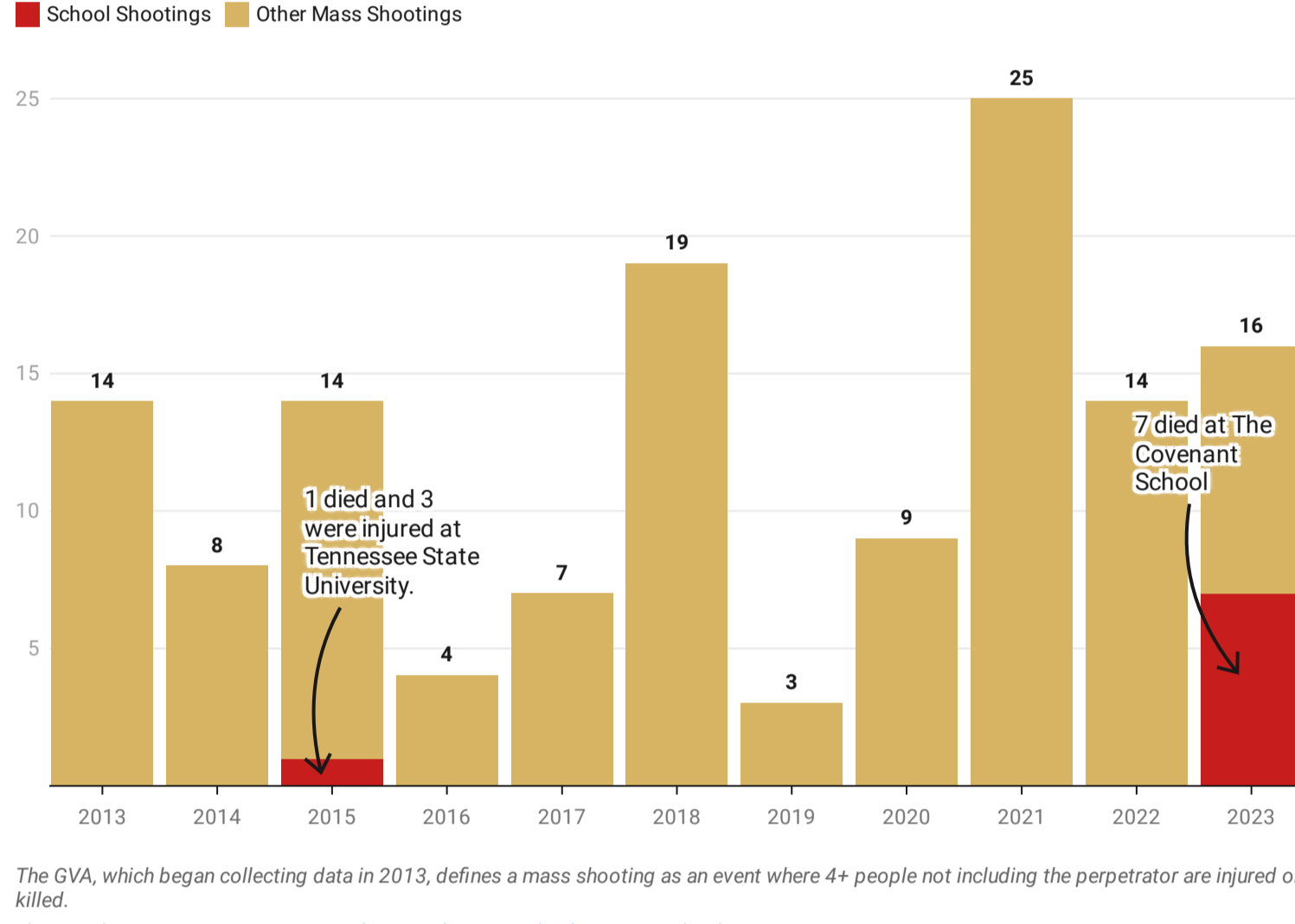
Chart: Katherine Oung • Source: CDC • Get the data • Created with Datawrapper

Professor Jonathan Metzl, who studies gun violence and mental health at Vanderbilt, characterized Tennessee’s gun laws as very lax. The Covenant School shooter owned seven legally purchased firearms, including an [AR-15](#) and [two handguns](#) that were used during the shooting.

“In our state, we have already been setting all records for the number of kids getting shot, mass shootings and shootings that don’t make the news,” Metzl said. “[The Covenant School shooting] is part of a bigger trend.”

Mass shooting deaths in Tennessee by year, as of April 2023

In the last decade, 146 mass shootings in Tennessee have occurred — two of which have been school shootings — and killed 133 people.



The GVA, which began collecting data in 2013, defines a mass shooting as an event where 4+ people not including the perpetrator are injured or killed.
Chart: Katherine Oung • Source: Gun Violence Archive • Get the data • Created with Datawrapper

On April 4, the Republican-led Tennessee Senate deferred much of the gun legislation introduced before The Covenant School shooting — regardless of whether it would loosen or restrict gun access — until 2024. The House will continue to hear these bills, but they cannot become law until at least April 2024 because the Senate would need to hear them.

Here’s what you need to know about existing gun laws in Tennessee and what new legislation is being considered.

Current gun laws in Tennessee

Tennessee legalized permitless-carry after the passage of [SB 265](#) in July 2021. This bill allows anyone 21 years or older — as well as law enforcement officers and military personnel 18 or older — to open- or conceal-carry a handgun in public, except in schools, public parks or government buildings. Residents can also obtain an enhanced license to carry handguns to public parks and into most other states.

Under federal law, individuals seeking to purchase a firearm through a licensed seller must undergo a background check, but this policy does not apply for unlicensed sellers. Sixteen states have enacted additional “universal background check” laws, which require background checks on all gun sales, but Tennessee has not. Federal law also prohibits individuals from possessing newly-manufactured fully automatic guns.

Tennessee Gun Laws 2023

	Handgun	Shotgun	Rifle
Universal background check	✗	✗	✗
Waiting period	✗	✗	✗
Permit to carry	✗	✗	✗
Gun storage requirement	✗	✗	✗
Age to purchase	21	18	18
Age to carry	18	No minimum	No minimum

Lexie Perez

Tennessee also does not have any waiting period laws or requirements for storing unattended firearms. However, people convicted of domestic violence crimes [cannot possess a firearm](#) [SB 12](#), which would have provided gun safety, violence intervention and youth employment training programs, was introduced at the start of this legislative session but failed.

The age requirement in Tennessee to purchase a handgun is 21, while the minimum age to possess a handgun is 18. The minimum age to purchase a shotgun or rifle, such as an AR-15, is 18 under federal law. In Tennessee, there is no minimum age to possess a shotgun or rifle.

[VUMC’s annual Child Health Poll](#) surveys Tennessee parents with children under 18. None of the firearm policies with the greatest support from respondents in the 2023 edition — universal background checks (70.5%), red flag laws (63.6%) and requirements to store guns securely at home (60.7%) — currently exist in Tennessee. The VUMC survey also found high levels of support for school safety policies, such as routine active shooter drills (71.2%), metal detectors (69.5%) and single entry points at schools (60.6%).

2023 Tennessee public opinion: firearms and school safety

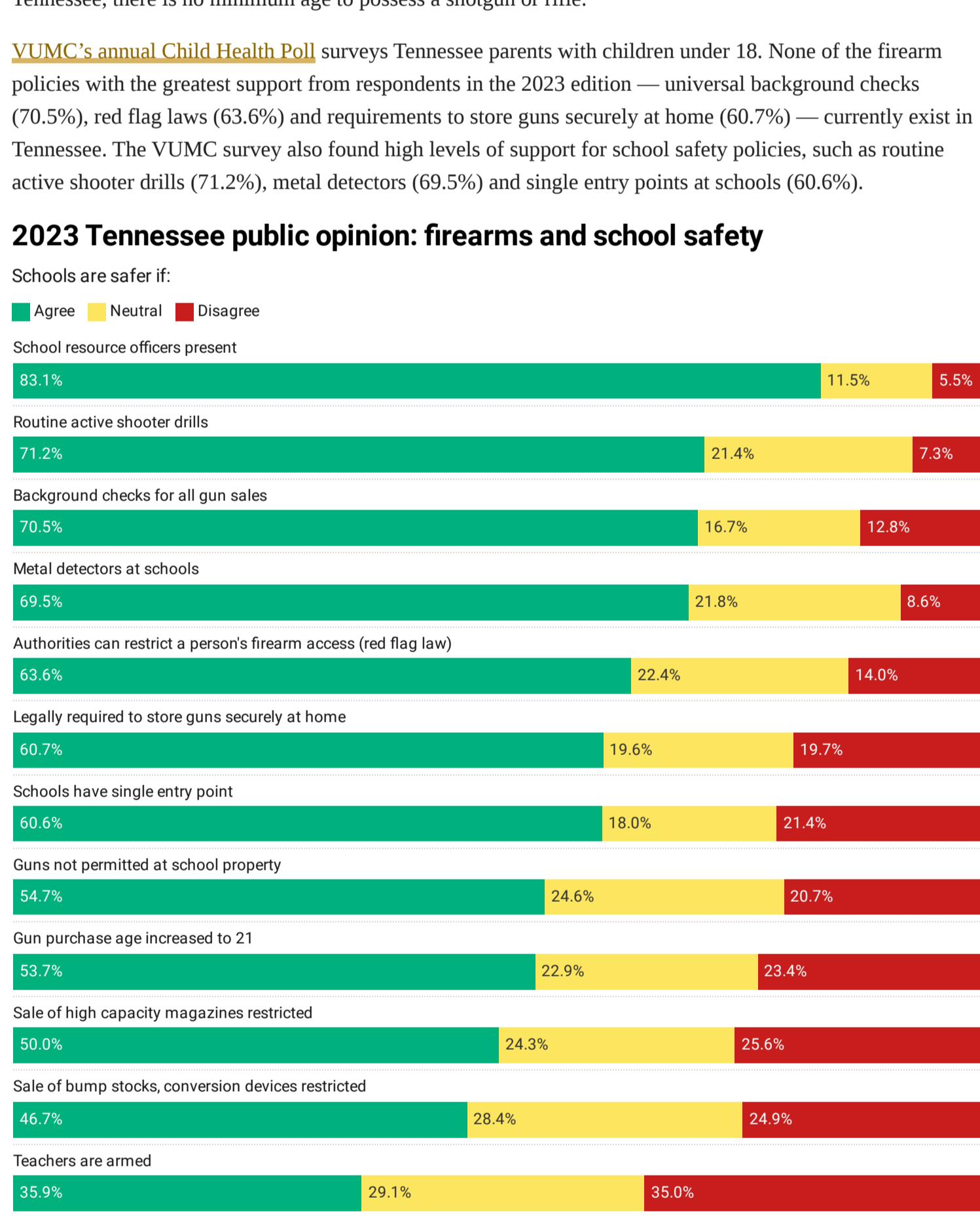


Chart: Aadii Letic • Source: VUMC Child Health Poll 2023 • Get the data • Embed • Created with Datawrapper

Vanderbilt currently [prohibits](#) anyone except on-duty police officers from possessing firearms on campus. [SB 827](#), which would allow college students to carry a gun on campus, failed in the Senate in March 2023.

Gun-related bills moving through legislature

Republicans have held the governorship and control of both chambers of the Tennessee General Assembly since 2011, currently occupying 100 of the 132 seats in the General Assembly. The 2023 Legislative Session is [scheduled](#) to run until May 4, but lawmakers may vote to adjourn earlier.

Political party makeup of the 114th Tennessee General Assembly

Republicans hold a supermajority in both chambers, and Gov. Bill Lee (R) leads the executive branch.



Rep. Justin Jones and Rep. Justin Pearson were expelled on April 6, leaving two seats vacant, but Jones was reappointed on April 10 and Pearson was reappointed on April 11.

Chart: Katherine Oung • Source: Tennessee General Assembly • Get the data • Created with Datawrapper

On April 3, Lee proposed that an additional [\\$205 million](#) of Tennessee state funds go toward K-12 safety and mental health programs. This proposal includes \$30 million for creating a network of Homeland Security agents who specialize in school safety and \$140 million for an expansion to [HB 322](#), a bill introduced this legislative session which has passed both the House and Senate and now awaits Lee’s approval.

HB 322 would place an armed School Resource Officer at every Tennessee public school, provide funding for private schools to do the same and require all schools to submit an annual safety plan.

The Delayed Bills committee also voted against the rest of the bills filed by Democrats as part of their “gun violence prevention package,” including a ban on high-capacity magazines ([SB 1565](#)), a ban on bump stocks ([SB 1566](#)), a reinstatement of the permit requirement ([SB 1568](#)) and a universal background check requirement ([SB 1568](#)).

Three days after being reinstated [to the legislature](#) after his [expulsion](#), Rep. Justin Jones (D) joined Sen. Charlane Oliver (D) to reintroduce many of the Democratic caucus’s gun reform proposals. Filed on April 13, the “Protect Kids not Guns Act” ([House Bill 1580](#)) awaits approval from the Delayed Bills Committee.

Several bills introduced at the beginning of the 2023 legislative session are still being considered by both the House and Senate. [HB 1005](#) would expand gun carry laws to apply to “any firearms” rather than just handguns — for instance, open-carry long guns currently must be unloaded, but handguns can be loaded or unloaded. [HB 1189](#), which protects gun manufacturers by limiting the circumstances that lawsuits can be brought against them, passed the House on March 9 and awaits approval from the Senate. [SB 1029](#), which would enact gun storage requirements, has been [held on desk](#) as of April 5 after previously being deferred, meaning the Senate may choose to vote on it soon.

Other bills deferred by the Senate Judiciary Committee include [HB 1138](#), which lowers the age to carry a handgun or obtain an enhanced license from 21 to 18; and [HB 1202](#), which would arm K-12 teachers.

HB 1202 would allow faculty members with enhanced carry permits to carry concealed handgun on school grounds. Despite being paused in the Senate, the bill has successfully gone through the House committee process and will be voted on by the House on April 17.

Sophomore elementary education major Bobbi Sloan joined a group of Vanderbilt students at the April 5 hearing of HB 1202, where it passed its second committee. Sloan participates in practicum at Dan Mills Elementary School and is an afterschool worker at the University School of Nashville. She said she would feel less safe at work if her colleagues were armed.

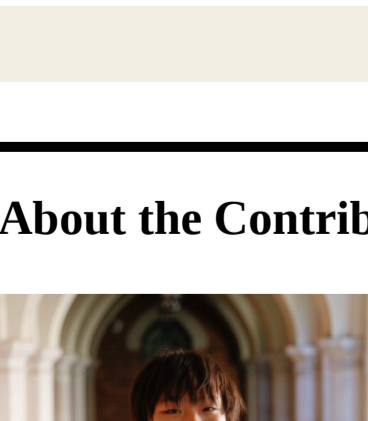
“I want guns out of my school, and I want it yesterday,” Sloan said. “We need legislators to stop adding gasoline to the fire and claiming it’s water.”

Lee [told Chalkbeat](#) in the wake of the Uvalde shooting he would “certainly consider” a law to equal teachers. Respondents to the VUMC survey were split on the topic of arming teachers, with approximately equal percentages of respondents supporting, opposing and being undecided on doing so.

[Bill Lee](#) [Covenant School](#) [gun laws](#) [march for our lives](#)

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Student organizers guard ISO's banner during the night, as photographed on Oct. 10, 2022. (Hustler Multimedia/Miguel Beristain) ([MIGUEL BERISTAIN](#))

Indigenous Scholars Organization holds 24-hour protest, university refuses to adopt land acknowledgment

In a protest and petition, ISO called for the university to adopt a land acknowledgment, establish a designated community space and create an Indigenous Studies program.

[KATHERINE OUNG](#), Managing Editor

OCTOBER 13, 2022

Over 20 students from the Indigenous Scholars Organization staged a 24-hour long protest outside of Rand Dining Hall to raise attention to issues faced by Indigenous students, to commemorate Indigenous People’s Day and to advocate for an official university land acknowledgment. A university representative stated in an Oct. 11 message to The Hustler that Vanderbilt does not currently plan to adopt a land acknowledgment.

Protestors hung a banner reading, “Indigenous Justice Now! Hold Vanderbilt Accountable for Stolen Land.” The demonstration started at 12:30 p.m. CDT on Oct. 10 and ended at 12:30 p.m. CDT the next day.

During the protest, ISO circulated a [Indigenous People’s Day Coalition Statement](#) and petition via email to five administrators including Chancellor Daniel Diermier, Dean of Ingram Commons Melissa Gresalfi and Dean of Students G.L. Black. Per ISO co-president and second-year graduate student Dante Reyna, ISO has not received a response to their petition as of print.

The statement details six demands from ISO to the university, the first of which is for the university to pass a land acknowledgment. In an Oct. 11 statement to The Hustler, the university stated that it would not endorse an official land acknowledgment due to “legal implications,” but did not respond to The Hustler’s inquiry about specific concerns.

“Vanderbilt community members who make land acknowledgments do not speak for the university,” the university statement reads.

Indigenous People’s Day Coalition Statement

As of print, 221 students, alumni and community members have signed ISO’s statement and petition. Per Reyna, [ISO has advocated](#) for the university to adopt a land acknowledgment for nearly four years.

“A land acknowledgment is simply the bare minimum that the university can do to address Indigenous issues,” Reyna said. “In addition to that, the quality of life, and especially the quality of student life, is substantially worse for Indigenous people.”

In September 2019, VSG [passed](#) the [Indigenous People’s Day and Land Recognition Bill](#), affirming its support of the university adopting a land acknowledgment and reading it at major school events. A resolution asking the university to adopt a land acknowledgment—which was written by ISO—was [brought forward](#) to the Faculty Senate in January 2021. The Senate voted to recommit it to its Diversity, Equity and Inclusion committee.

“The Faculty Senate, through its committee structure, continues to consider issues of importance to the faculty in the shared governance model in which we participate,” current Faculty Senate Chair Rebecca Swan said in an Oct. 13 message to The Hustler.

The second demand listed on the petition asks the university to create a designated space on campus for Indigenous students to “gather, celebrate and rest.” Reyna pointed to the small

percentage of Native American students—0.4% of the campus **population**—as a reason for a campus center.

“Indigenous people flourish in their own spaces,” Reyna said. “An Indigenous space would provide us an avenue in order to feel like ourselves and for us to practice our traditions and ceremonies in a safe place.”

Other demands include for the university to establish an Indigenous Studies major and minor led by Indigenous faculty and to create an orientation program educating incoming undergraduates about the history and current issues faced by Native Americans in Tennessee. ISO added that the university should “make space” for more on-campus leadership opportunities for Indigenous students and faculty.

The petition also calls for the university to enforce rules preventing non-Indigenous faculty from “keeping and maligning” Indigenous artifacts. In 2007, a then-graduate student filed a **lawsuit** against anthropology professor Arthur Demarest, in part accusing him of “destruction of artifacts” while on a dig site in Guatemala. The parties reached a confidential settlement in 2008. Demarest told *The Hustler* that the lawsuit’s accusations are false, and all of the artifacts that he owns are replicas or gifts given to him by Indigenous communities.

Department of Anthropology Chair Beth Conklin stated in a message to *The Hustler* that the department, which houses a substantial amount of Indigenous artifacts at Vanderbilt, “has a deep commitment to ethical stewardship of Native American ancestral remains and belongings housed on campus.” Per Conklin, the department repatriated ancestral remains to the Chickasaw Nation in 2019 and is housing remaining Native American ancestral remains and belongings in “locked locations out of sight” as it continues the repatriation process.

“We are in the early stages of reimagining new and innovative approaches to supporting all Vanderbilt community members’ identities with the goal of strengthening a sense of belonging for everyone at the university,” the university stated in its Oct. 11 message to *The Hustler*. “We will be working through this process in close collaboration with Vanderbilt Student Government and the Faculty Senate beginning later this fall.”

Protest

During the protest, a group of approximately 20 ISO members and student volunteers took shifts guarding the banner that they had hung outside of Rand. Six students stayed outside throughout the night.

““ People aren’t listening to us, so we’re taking alternative steps to make sure that our community is recognized and has power within these processes.”

— *Annabelle Littlejohn-Bailey*

Sophomore Shalini Thinakaran, who took part in the demonstration, called it an “homage” to a similar protest organized by ISO and the African Student Union last year in March. In response to a Chabad speaker [event](#), ISO and ASU hung a banner outside Rand, which was taken down by Black due to it not being attributed to a student organization. Organizers then put up another banner and guarded it [overnight](#).

Per ISO co-president and junior Annabelle Littlejohn-Bailey, the organizers hoped to place pressure on the university to generate broader support for ISO’s demands. Littlejohn-Bailey is a staff writer for The Hustler.

“We want to push for an Indigenous community that has a voice and feels that it can go through the normal process of appealing to our administration and appealing to professors, but we feel that all of those normal processes so far have led us to nothing,” Littlejohn-Bailey said. “People aren’t listening to us, so we’re taking alternative steps to make sure that our community is recognized and has power within these processes.”

The Indigenous People’s Day protest concluded with a speech by Reyna to a group of gathered student organizers and onlookers.

“It is our job to shed light on the history that came before us and for all those whose light was extinguished,” Reyna said. “We are eternal visitors to this land and must work with indigenous people to illuminate the way for those lost and, more importantly, make sure that what was lost is never lost again.”

[View comments \(10\)](#)



Graduate Workers United calls for vision and dental insurance subsidies at demonstration

Graduate workers circulated a petition with over 1,000 signatures requesting 75% of vision and dental premiums to be covered by the university.



AMELIA SIMPSON

Graduate students holding a town hall on Alumni Lawn, as photographed on Sept. 9. (Hustler Multimedia/Amelia Simpson)

KATHERINE OUNG, Managing Editor
 SEPTEMBER 11, 2022

Over 45 Vanderbilt Graduate Workers United (VGWU) organizers, other graduate students and advocates from [Dignidad Obrera](#) (Workers' Dignity)—an organization that advocates for economic justice in Nashville—gathered at Alumni Lawn on Sept. 9 for a town hall and protest. They called on Vanderbilt to offset the cost of vision and dental insurance for graduate students.

[Vision](#) and [dental](#) insurance are currently listed as add-ons for graduate and undergraduate students enrolled in the Student Health Insurance Plan (SHIP), meaning that students must pay an additional premium to receive coverage. VGWU requests that the university cover 75% of vision and dental premiums for graduate students on the SHIP plan. Fourth-year graduate student and Graduate Student Council (GSC) secretary Michael Reynolds cited [inflation](#) and the [rising cost of living](#) in Nashville as reasons why affordable dental and vision coverage is a pressing issue.

At the demonstration, attendees carried signs with messages such as “We need to see,” “Insure me!” and “Nerds need glasses!” VGWU’s [petition](#), which details their demands, has 1,085 signatures from graduate students, faculty and community members listed on the document as of print.

Third-year graduate student and VGWU communications chair Nick Goodell said he is unable to afford the wisdom teeth removal surgery that he needs. First-year graduate student Kieren Coffey stated that he cannot afford to have regular teeth cleanings or access preventative care such as dental x-rays. Sixth-year graduate student Katrina Ngo described making the choice to get married and file as a dependent under her partner’s insurance to pay for her wisdom teeth removal surgery and eye exams due to the high cost of SHIP’s vision and dental insurance premiums.

“My boyfriend at the time was like, ‘let’s just get married so that you can have my insurance. So life-hack, you can just get married,’” Ngo said, receiving laughter from the crowd. “Luckily, I’m on his insurance now, but it sucks that we had to rush that decision.”

In a press release for the event sent to The Hustler, VGWU claimed that Vanderbilt has adequate financial resources to provide subsidies to graduate students, pointing to the size of the university’s endowment. In 2021, Vanderbilt reported a 57.1% [increase](#) in the school’s endowment, totaling \$10.9 billion. In a Sept. 9 message to The Hustler, a university representative stated that the university is engaging with GSC, the “official organization representing graduate students at Vanderbilt,” to discuss “questions and concerns” about current coverage options.

“We are considering the feedback we have heard and are working with our plan administrator on options going forward,” the university stated. “A group of students who are not the recognized representative body for graduate students at the university organized today’s demonstration.”

Per GSC President and third-year graduate student Miguel Moravec, the GSC met with Christie-Mizell and Dean of Students G.L. Black on July 9 to advocate for 75% or more of vision and dental premiums to be subsidized by the university.

“The GSC recognizes all groups composed of our graduate student constituents, including VGWU, as important campus stakeholders and partners,” Moravec said. “The GSC unanimously endorsed sharing the dental/vision petition.”

VGWU stated that Vanderbilt should implement coverage-related reforms to stay competitive in the market for graduate students. Several of Vanderbilt’s peer institutions provide insurance subsidies for graduate students.

Universities with some of the most comprehensive benefit packages include [Brown University](#) and [Columbia University](#), which provide a 100% and 75% subsidy of the dental insurance premium for PhD students, respectively, and access to a vision discount program. [Georgetown University](#) also covers 100% of PhD student’s dental insurance premium but does not subsidize vision insurance. [Harvard University](#), [Duke University](#) and [Tulane University](#) are among other peer institutions that The Hustler was able to confirm provide at least partial dental and/or vision subsidies to graduate students.

“Vanderbilt claims to be a top-tier university. How are we going to attract talent without decent health insurance?” eighth-year graduate student and VGWU secretary Alex Korsunsky stated in the press release. “If we’ve got a prospective recruit with a competing offer from Brown or Georgetown, I couldn’t in good faith tell them to come here.”

Coffey stated that maintaining the health of graduate students would positively impact student performance and productivity, thus benefiting the university.

“I think it makes a lot of sense to take care of the people that work for you,” Coffey said. “You have a bunch of graduate students, and you don’t pay for them to get eye exams when we read for a living.”

Students also shared resources for graduate students seeking additional financial assistance. Third-year graduate student and VGWU co-president Maxwell Hamilton explained that students working in biological and medical science departments affiliated with the Office of Biomedical Research Education and Training (BRET) can be reimbursed for dental and vision insurance costs, but the opportunity is only available for students whose advisor is willing and able to pay using their grant funding. Similarly, Reynolds described how he successfully applied for [financial assistance](#) after receiving care from the Vanderbilt University Medical Center (VUMC). Assistance is given on a case-by-case basis to individuals with no or limited insurance benefits.

Although Hamilton seeks to educate other graduate students about their healthcare options, he took issue with the university having a “patchwork” of resources rather than a subsidy for all graduate students, regardless of department or lab affiliation.

“The fact that your insurance is contingent on which lab you join is completely ridiculous. You have to have an awkward conversation with your advisor, and they might say no,” Hamilton said. “Really, everyone should just get it [coverage] unconditionally.”

Other recent advocacy by graduate students surrounding this issue includes a March 22 [open letter](#) from BRET graduate students that described a lack of vision and dental coverage as an exacerbating factor of an alleged graduate student mental health crisis. On May 9, Christie-Mizell sent an email to graduate students, which detailed new mental health and financial resources for graduate students, but did not include changes to insurance subsidies.

After sharing testimonials and speeches, the town hall attendees walked to Alumni Hall, the location of Graduate School Dean André Christie-Mizell’s office, to deliver a copy of their petition to him. Per third-year graduate student and VGWU treasurer Patrick Reilly, the dean was not present when the graduate students entered his office, and an administrative assistant declined to deliver the petition to Christie-Mizell or allow the students to place it into his mailbox. Reilly stated that the group left the petition in a “visible, open area” in the office.

[Dean André Christie-Mizell](#) [GL Black](#) [Graduate Student Council](#)
[Vanderbilt Graduate Workers United](#)

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Recap by: [@Jay_Feat](#)

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