Dear Vanderbilt community,

As the academic year comes to a close, I want to take a moment to reflect on the past year and express my gratitude to all who have supported our community. This year has been filled with challenges and opportunities, and I have been inspired by the resilience and dedication of our students, faculty, and staff.

I want to express my appreciation to those who have worked tirelessly to ensure that our campus remains a safe and welcoming place for all. Whether it was through the efforts of Human Resources to increase on-campus presence, or the renovation and accessibility improvements at the Owen Graduate School of Management, we have made progress towards creating a more inclusive and equitable environment.

I also want to acknowledge the contributions of Margaret Axelrod, Rachel Brown, and Simone Herzberg, who are among the Medical Scientist Training Program students receiving their PhDs. Their hard work and dedication are a testament to the importance of education and research in our community.

In addition, I want to thank Haslam for his call to action on criminal justice reform. His leadership has been a key factor in advancing the causes of racial justice and social equity.

Throughout the year, we have continued to explore the twin ideals of open inquiry and free expression, and I look forward to the continued dialogue and discourse that will take place at the world-renowned Aspen Ideas Festival on June 29.

The importance of free expression at universities cannot be overstated. As the Vanderbilt community, we are the change agents we seek. We have the power to create change. We are the doers and thinkers of the world. We must continue to push our boundaries and strive for excellence in all that we do.

As we move forward, I encourage all of you to think about what it means to be a global citizen. If you are interested in participating or proposing program ideas, please contact the Office for EDI and ISSS.

We are the staff that will lead the next generation, so the tenacity we expect of our students is the same tenacity we must expect of ourselves. We must be the change we want to see in the world.

But we are surviving. I have endured unspeakable pain that I didn't think I could endure. I have struggled to find meaning in my work, and so do our students when they approach us. My mom was raised in a marginalized community and so are our students. I bring my personal self to these forces of expression as well as higher education's unique role in advancing knowledge, understanding, and social progress.

As we look towards the future, I hope that we can continue to work together towards a better tomorrow. Let us come to the understanding that we are more beneficial to our community when we show up authentic and present. I'm better when I am open and honest about my experience and my understanding of myself.

This summer has been intense, and as much as I wish it could be different, it is what it is. I am a woman. I'm exhausted. Literally exhausted. I'm a woman of color, and not just any woman of color. I'm Black. I'm from a very specific background that has taught me to always be on my best behavior, always be on my best face, and always be on my best mind.

I have fertility issues. I'm Black. I'm a woman. I'm pushing my mental health to the back burner. In this day, it must be a priority for us, as individuals, to take care of ourselves and each other.

Our community is resilient, and as I look towards the future, I am hopeful that we can continue to learn from each other and grow as a community.

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