



BALTIMORE EDUCATIONAL AND SOCIAL SOCIETY

BESS "SAFE SPACE" POLICY

I. Overview

BESS tries to provide a safe and relaxing atmosphere at all of its events and, to that end, BESS maintains a "Safe Space" policy that applies to any BESS-sponsored activity, including BESS-maintained e-mail lists. Incidents occurring outside of BESS meetings or social events may also constitute violations of this policy if they occur between BESS contributors and/or guests, and are related to a BESS-sponsored activity. The BESS Safe Space policy does not extend to personality or management conflicts and domestic disputes.

Safe space is an environment where all BESS contributors and guests can feel free of threats, intimidation, harassment and the deliberate, or negligent, creation of unsafe conditions. It is an environment of tolerance, dignity and respect for the confidentiality of others. Although BESS strives to create a pleasant environment for social interaction, and has created this policy to further that goal, the terms "safe space" and "safe" do not imply that BESS can guarantee the safety of BESS contributors or guests. Each contributor and guest remains ultimately responsible for their own safety and the safety of others.

If, at a BESS sponsored event, a contributor or guest feels that BESS Safe space has been violated they should immediately bring the situation to the attention of a BESS staff member. Disruptive or inappropriate behavior by individuals may also create an environment that adversely affects, or distracts, those attending an event. In either case, BESS staff are empowered by the Board to take immediate action to alleviate the problem, the first priority being the safety of those present. BESS staff are expected to exercise their best judgment and take the minimum action that they deem necessary to insure the continued safety and comfort of those attending the event. Examples of immediate action might be a verbal warning or removal of the offending individual from the venue.

All participants at BESS sponsored events may file written complaints against individuals who they consider to have acted in a manner that violates the BESS Safe Space policy. This individual action is referred to as a "Safe Space Complaint". The BESS Board of Directors and Ombudsman will receive all Safe Space Complaints, adjudicate the merits of each case and are empowered to impose appropriate sanctions on behalf of the contributors. The Board may also initiate disciplinary action against individuals who show a repeated pattern of minor violations.

II. The BESS Ombudsman

The BESS Ombudsman is responsible for the fair resolution and procedural monitoring of all Safe Space Complaints. The BESS Ombudsman will be elected by the BESS Contributors at the Annual Business Meeting and will serve a one-year term. The Ombudsman may not serve concurrently as a BESS Director.

III. Safe Space Complaints

III.a The Letter of Complaint

To initiate a Safe Space Complaint an individual prepares a letter of complaint and sends it to the BESS Board of Directors by regular or electronic mail. The letter of complaint must include sufficient supporting information to permit evaluation of the complaint. The contributor who files the complaint may use a scene name or alias, but must include valid contact information so BESS may respond. The Board will acknowledge receipt within ten days.

The Board may independently initiate disciplinary action against individuals who show a repeated pattern of minor violations. A board member will file the letter of complaint on behalf of BESS.

BESS will expedite the processing of a Safe Space Complaint to the extent that all parties involved are fairly heard and the matter is resolved in a timely fashion.

III.b Initial Review

Upon receipt of a Safe Space Complaint, a subcommittee of two Directors and the BESS Ombudsman (the review subcommittee) will be convened. This subcommittee will determine if the alleged violation falls under the Safe Space policy.

If it is determined that the complaint falls outside of the Safe Space policy, the person initiating the complaint is notified.

If it is determined that the complaint falls under the Safe Space policy, then the review subcommittee will contact the subject of the complaint and may conduct an informal investigation into the nature of the complaint. The review subcommittee will attempt to resolve the complaint informally and to the satisfaction of all involved. This is the recommended course of action for minor violations when those responsible acknowledge the violation and are judged unlikely to repeat the actions that led to the complaint.

If the validity of the complaint is contested, or the alleged violation is sufficiently serious to warrant further action, then the review subcommittee will initiate a Safe Space Meeting as described below.

The contributor filing the complaint will be informed, in writing, of the decision of the review subcommittee. The contributor may appeal the subcommittee's decision, in which case the entire board will then review the complaint. In the case of an appeal, the board's decision regarding the disposition of the complaint will be final.

If a Safe Space Meeting is initiated, the BESS Ombudsman will make a reasonable effort to arrange suitable venues, dates and times that are agreeable to all parties.

All safe space Meetings will be conducted by a panel consisting of the BESS Ombudsman and four BESS Directors, selected by majority vote of the Board. The BESS Ombudsman will act as Chair of the panel. The panel will decide the format of the Meeting. Directors may voluntarily exclude themselves from the proceedings for reasons of personal conflict.

Only the members of the review panel and those persons referenced in the written complaint and response from the subject may attend the meetings that follow.

III.c Temporary Suspension of Privileges.

If the review subcommittee considers the violation described in the complaint to be particularly egregious and likely to re-occur prior to a Safe Space Meeting, the board may temporarily suspend a contributor's access to BESS-sponsored events and/or e-mail lists.

III.d Complaints Against Board Members and Conflicts of Interest

Any board member who is the subject of a complaint, or feels unable to act in an impartial manner will be removed from consideration of the complaint and an alternate board member will serve in his/her place on the panel.

IV. The Safe Space Meeting

The objective of a safe space Meeting is to recommend to the Board a course of action that will preserve and protect BESS Safe Space. The board is empowered to act to further this end. This is not intended as a form of punishment. A Safe Space Meeting is not a trial. All present are expected to conduct themselves with dignity and respect for others. Safe space Meetings are confidential, and distribution of the results of a Safe Space Complaint investigation outside of the board is prohibited so as to protect the privacy of the individuals involved.

If an individual wishes to avoid confrontation with other parties named in the complaint, they may opt to privately address the panel.

After the meeting, the panel will deliberate privately and recommend an appropriate course of action, if any, to the Board of Directors. The entire Board of Directors will decide on any actions to be taken, in response to the recommendation of the panel. The Ombudsman may serve on the board to replace any director removed from the decision for the Safe Space Complaint resolution.

The contributor filing the complaint and the subject of the complaint will be informed, in writing, of the final decision of the Board of Directors.