

Good morning Chairperson and members of the Council,

My name is Ray Epstein, and I am a senior at Temple University, serving as the student body president. Today, I would like to tell you how meaningful my Temple experience has been and how it has prepared me for what I believe will be a successful future.

When I was a prospective student touring universities, it was early 2021—we were still limited by the boundaries of a pandemic lockdown. It was nearly impossible to visualize yourself as part of a campus community that felt somewhat deserted when you visited. But at Temple, after an outdoor tour, I went to grab a coffee at Saxby's—a campus gem. Socially distanced and masked, enrolled in college during a confusing period of global history, the baristas still danced as they made your coffees and sang along to "Don't Worry Be Happy" using a simple syrup jar as a microphone. I saw students who couldn't look happier, thriving and making the most of a terrible situation that the world had found itself in. I knew then, that Temple would be home.

Before college, my educational experience was imperfect. I spent two years of high school learning virtually during the pandemic, and prior, for the most part, had impassionate teachers. But on my first day of classes at Temple, my entire perception of what education was supposed to feel and look like shifted. In my Intro to Sociology class, we sat around a conference table, facing each other. My professor asked for our thoughts and opinions on the world, on news, on books, and on social situations. He told us that in that classroom, we would learn not only from the text, but from each other. This was what a good education should look like.

I felt empowered by how professors engaged with students, so much so that I started my student organization: Student Activists Against Sexual Assault. Our executive board was comprised of students of diverse majors because no matter what you study at Temple, you gain the leadership skills necessary to organize and create. In our first year as a student organization, with the support of our Student Activities office, we connected survivors with resources, built our membership to nearly 500 students, and created a mandatory fraternity workshop around the sexual violence documentary *The Hunting Ground*. In our second year, we partnered with Uber to provide \$350,000 in free rides to students in unsafe situations. We assisted in securing the It's On Us grant to provide Temple with \$20,000 in anti-sexual violence effort funding. We launched an app called *Here4U* to assist survivors in navigating resources. This month, with the support of my student organization and the people I have met along the way, we are introducing a bipartisan bill to the PA legislature to support student survivors.

After learning of the Harry S. Truman Scholarship, I met with Temple's Fellowship Advising Office. It was because of that office's unwavering support and dedication to resources that I was able to ultimately become a Truman Scholar this past April. The same office propelled me to become a finalist for the Rhodes Scholarship this past November.

If I have learned anything in my time at Temple, it is that there is no such thing as reaching too far. Temple University will catch you when you fall and push you back up to achieve something greater. Our

diverse nest, which hosts so many unique students, would not be the way I have described to you, a place that allows anyone to take a leap without state support.

Thank you.