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**Statement made by Michelle Ayer, Chair, at the June 18, 2018
School Committee Meeting**

The school committee has received communications over the past few days relating to students who may feel marginalized or unsupported and I'd like to address this with the following statement tonight:

Freedom of expression is a fundamental right in this country. Freedom to learn in a safe and supportive environment is part of the mission of Hingham Public Schools and a fundamental right of every student. And while students, employees and volunteers have a right to freely express their opinions, they also have a RESPONSIBILITY to uphold the mission, values and policies of Hingham Public Schools.

Regardless of their intention, comments or actions that mock, belittle or are dismissive of an individual or a community are hurtful. When those comments or actions result in students feeling unwelcome, excluded, or afraid, the mission of HPS has not been upheld.

Recently, there has been a barrage of posts on social media and reports in the media regarding offensive comments. Apologies have been made and have been accepted by the administration. The Hingham School Committee will be reviewing social media and other policies throughout the district.

But our community can do more. We have to do more. We can take this opportunity to foster open and civil discussions—in person, not behind keyboards—and bring about real change in attitudes and in mindsets. We can disagree with each other but those disagreements can be tempered with empathy and kindness. We can be more thoughtful and less mean spirited. We can be better.

We must be better because at this moment there is a community of students who feel marginalized. And I, along with many other people here tonight, want to assure those students that you are accepted. You are welcomed. You are protected. And we will strive to do better for you.