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After Notre Dame students organized a petition opposing the university's decision to bring Chick-fil-A to campus, a spokesman said the company responded to the petition's concerns "in a satisfactory manner." (CNS/Reuters/Rashid Umar)

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The University of Notre Dame will go forward with construction of a new Chick-fil-A restaurant on campus, despite objections from nearly 200 students, alumni and faculty who signed a petition opposing the company’s anti-LGBTQ history, use of factory farming, and a lack of vegan and vegetarian options on campus.

The university's decision was announced as part of a new campus dining master plan on July 15, the same day South Carolina Sen. Lindsey Graham reacted to the controversy, tweeting "I hope we don’t have to, but I will go to war for the principles Chick fil-A stands for."

In a statement, the university said it had "examined the concerns surrounding Chick-fil-A's charitable giving, discussed them with company representatives, campus partners and students and believes that Chick-fil-A has responded to these issues in a satisfactory manner."

The petition against the restaurant was organized by three students who wrote a July 1 letter in the campus newspaper outlining concerns about Chick-fil-A, including its history of donating to groups that "harm the LGBTQ community."

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"Over the past two decades, Chick-fil-A has donated significant sums to groups that oppose LGBTQ+ rights," the letter said. "From 2003 to 2012, the restaurant's charitable arm gave over $5 million to queerphobic groups, including groups supporting conversion therapy."

The student letter also mentioned donations to groups such as the Fellowship of Christian Athletes, Salvation Army and Paul Anderson Youth Home. The company has described those donations as "mischaracterized."

"The narrative that our giving was done to support a political or non-inclusive agenda is inaccurate and misleading," the 2019 Chick-fil-A statement reads.

Donations made through Chick-fil-A CEO Dan Cathy's family foundation were also cited in the student letter. A June Business Insider article describes the link between the Dan and Rhonda Cathy Foundation and the National Christian Charitable Foundation, which includes organizations fighting the Equality Act, proposed legislation to prohibit discrimination of LGBTQ people. Cathy also has publicly opposed marriage equality.

Mary D'Angelo, a retired Notre Dame professor of New Testament and religion, said she signed the petition because it supported her Catholic values.

"The labor practices and the factory farming practices undermine Catholics' commitments to the just treatment of workers and the care for the environment," D'Angelo said. "They're [factory farming practices] not good for climate change, they're not good for care for the earth."

Notre Dame spokesman Dennis Brown declined to comment on Chick-fil-A's history of factory farming. The company's website denies mistreatment of animals, saying their chickens are raised "in barns (not cages)."

Tilly Keeven-Glascock, one of three authors of the letter, said as a queer Catholic she usually felt welcome on campus, on an institutional level, but Notre Dame should be "abundantly clear" that "anyone and everyone" is welcome.

After Fox News published an article about the controversy, Keeven-Glascock said she and the other authors, Jim Moster and Joey Jegier, immediately began to receive online harassment, including death threats.

The trio alerted campus dining officials about the harassment in a July 14 email shared with NCR: "The [Fox] article mischaracterized us as trivial 'cancel culture' activists with an anti-Christian agenda, which could not be further from the truth. We just wish for our retail dining experience to match Notre Dame's commitment to social justice and charity toward all."

The students say they received no direct response about the harassment, but Luigi Alberganti, senior director of campus dining, met July 19 with PrismND, the undergraduate LGBTQ group, and a representative of Notre Dame's Herbivore Society. Keeven-Glascock is secretary of PrismND.

They discussed the university's decision-making process to bring Chick-fil-A to campus and how student groups can weigh in on proposed dining options in the future, Keeven-Glascock said. The students also recommended bringing more vegan and vegetarian options to campus.

After Notre Dame released news of plans for the Chick-fil-A, Sen. Graham again chimed in on Twitter: "Well done to all the patriots at Notre Dame who stood up for Chick-fil-A and against Cancel Culture."

"Shocked" by the attention from Graham, Keeven-Glascock responded that she loves Notre Dame, saying, "It was never a war, it was never an us. vs. them."

She said Catholic identity drove her to work for the "common good," and that claims of an anti-Christian attack were off base.

Yet she saw the experience as an "unexpectedly valuable" opportunity.

"We’re trying to keep our heads up and look to the future positively on further activism and collaboration at Notre Dame, and simply creating a better campus experience at Notre Dame," she said.