

Dear NIETOC Community,

In moments of uncertainty, the voice of the speech and debate community echoes the furthest when we stand together with compassion, humanity, and purpose. On behalf of the NIETOC organization and the board of directors, we extend our unwavering solidarity to the students, families, coaches, and school communities across Minnesota who are navigating the realities of increased immigration enforcement and the systemic challenges of civil unrest. We hear you. We see you. And we stand beside you.

Our community has long believed in the power of dialogue to heal, to lift voices, and to create space for every member to grow with dignity and safety. The current climate affects not only those directly impacted but all of us who hold values of inclusion, fairness, and opportunity. We reject ICE's and other federal agencies' disregard for human life and stand in support of community members exercising their constitutional right to protest. We acknowledge the fear, the questions, and the resilience you bring to the classroom and the competitive stage. You are valued, you belong, and your contributions enrich our national celebration of advocacy through Speech.

Our priority is the safety of our students, coaches, and community members who attend our competition. We understand that some may have concerns about attending the national tournament this May in Shakopee, Minnesota. Please know that the NIETOC board is taking the necessary precautions to protect everyone—participants, coaches, volunteers, staff, and families—to the best of our abilities.

We have been closely monitoring the tragic occurrences in Minnesota as well as the escalating aggression of ICE in the country. We've consulted with coaches in Minnesota and across the country. The NIETOC board had planned to implement new security measures for the 2026 NIETOC tournament that will behoove and serve us as we face new concerns. A few other items of note: Shakopee School District (in a suburban area of Minnesota) does not allow ICE agents on school property without a judicial warrant. Unlike in recent years, the 2026 tournament will be in one location—from Thursday evening's registration and workshops through the awards ceremony on Sunday—we are enclosed entirely in the school for the whole weekend.

At this time, our position is to continue with the tournament as planned in-person in Shakopee, MN. Any changes to the tournament plan will be communicated prior to or by March 31, 2026.

As an organization, we recommit to the core principles that bind us: safety, equity, and respect for every participant. We will continue coordinating with school administrators, venue partners,

and additional safety professionals to ensure our tournament environment prioritizes well-being for all attendees.

To every student who sees themselves reflected on our stages, to every judge who dedicates themselves to mentoring thoughtful speakers, and to every coach who cultivates not only argument but also character: your courage inspires us. Your stories matter, and your right to participate in a supportive, inclusive space matters more than ever.

We invite all members of our NIETOC family to join us in two practical commitments:

1. Speak out with kindness and solidarity when others are marginalized or singled out, and uplift each other with the respect that every voice deserves. The Minnesota Urban Debate League is inviting messages of support for their students who are navigating this fear and uncertainty right now. Their initiative is an opportunity for our community to share words of encouragement. Please consider sending a message through [this link](#).
2. We will implement and continuously review safeguarding measures, maintain clear communication channels, and act promptly should any concerns arise. Please stay informed on [NIETOC.org](#) as well as on SpeechWire, and share them with your teams so that preparation and participation remain possible for all.

Thank you for your resilience, perseverance, and belief in the power of performance. Together, we will navigate these challenges with empathy, integrity, and a tireless commitment to the well-being and success of every participant.

With solidarity and hope,

Anna K. Steed, NIETOC President
Justin Kurup, NIETOC Vice President
Matt Heimes, NIETOC Tournament Director