PRESS STATEMENT

FROM: HONORABLE KENNETH I. STOKES, WARD 3 JACKSON CITY COUNCIL
DATE: NOVEMBER 12, 2026

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

The application of a punishment arbitrarily issued because a Councilmember simply did not like my response to an audience member's attack on my deceased mother reflects authoritarian conduct, in my opinion.

I have been encouraged to make a public apology. I would like to say that I do have regrets. However, they are not for the exercise of my First Amendment free-speech rights.

I regret that this Council has the time to discuss this insignificant matter instead of concentrating its energy on issues that the citizens of Jackson really care about, issues that affect their daily lives. I regret that we are not diligently searching for every possible way to fund those desperately needed improvements.

I regret that the Council is not focused on addressing the spike in violent crime in Jackson, with a murder count that sadly continues to rise with no real solutions on the horizon.

I regret that we are unable to fully fund police officer vacancies and salaries, leaving many citizens vulnerable in the neighborhoods where police protection is needed the most.

I regret that our municipal water system failures have still not been addressed and billing for many is still unresolved.

I regret that hundreds of apartment complexes are uninhabitable as a result of landlord neglect and the people who live in those units are on their own when it comes to flooding, trash pickup, and utility shutoffs.

I regret that our code enforcement offices are severely understaffed, leaving many taxpaying home and property owners trapped by abandoned, dangerous, and nuisance-attracting parcels with no relief and no support from the city their taxes fund.

I regret that property values are declining in many of our neighborhoods which especially hurts those who have worked their entire lives to purchase homes that are no longer valuable or safe to live in.

I regret that we live in a city where we are no longer able to discuss or debate important issues like a data center in a public forum without someone referencing my deceased mother in a highly offensive manner, in an effort to silence my opinion.

Until these issues are addressed in a meaningful way, this Council will continue to be ineffective and our citizens will continue to suffer.

SWEET & ASSOCIATES
ATTORNEYS AT LAW

November 12, 2026

Councilman Vernon W. Hartley, Sr.
President, Jackson City Council
219 South President Street
Post Office Box 17
Jackson, Mississippi 39205

RE: Jackson City Councilman Kenneth I. Stokes – Proposed Censure

Dear Councilman Hartley:

Recently, my law firm was retained by Jackson City Councilman Kenneth I. Stokes regarding a proposed censure. Accordingly, any and all communications pertaining to this matter should be directed to my attention.

I am in receipt of a copy of your correspondence to Councilman Stokes, dated November 9, 2026, which includes a proposed censure resolution. In this correspondence you threaten to censure Councilman Stokes for comments made by him during a recent City Council meeting. This correspondence alleges that Councilman Stokes acted in a manner "inconsistent" with the standards established by Section 2-77(1) of the Jackson Code of Ordinances.

As for a brief history, Councilman Stokes attended the November 3, 2026, City Council meeting, wherein he proposed a resolution terminating the City of Jackson's moratorium on so-called "data centers." During this meeting, a member of the general public addressed Councilman Stokes and vocalized highly offensive and vulgar comments concerning his mother. Such comments or "fighting words" were intended to, and did in fact, elicit a response from Councilman Stokes. This response by Councilman Stokes included the statement "But, I'll curse that bitch out."

In response to your correspondence and proposed censure, Councilman Stokes would state unequivocally that he has at all times acted in the best interest of the City of Jackson. Further, Councilman Stokes would state that your effort to penalize him with a censure for speech made during the November 3, 2026, City Council meeting is improper, unlawful, and in violation of his Due Process rights guaranteed by both the United States and Mississippi Constitutions.

A censure is defined as an "official reprimand or condemnation; an authoritative expression of disapproval or blame; reproach." *Censure*, Black's Law Dictionary (11th ed. 2019). A censure is punitive and a "serious sanction." *Mississippi Comm'n on Jud. Performance v. Brown*, 761 So. 2d 182 (Miss. 2000).

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