

### **SMU Statement Regarding The Sumners Foundation**

In 1968, the Hatton W. Sumners Foundation established a scholarship at SMU Dedman School of Law. The purpose of the scholarship program was defined as developing “lawyers who will not only be equipped to perform skillfully the lawyer’s professional functions, but who will also be imbued with ideals of community and public service.” For more than fifty years, the Sumners scholarship program has brought outstanding students to SMU who have graduated and become leaders in the profession and their communities, and SMU is very grateful to the Foundation for funding the education of so many remarkable law students.

However, SMU has become aware that Congressman Sumners, for whom the Foundation is named, espoused views that are antithetical to the University’s mission and core values. Through his writing and public statements, he used his public office to advocate for white supremacy and against critical protections of life and liberty for people of color. SMU repudiates Congressman Sumners’ statements and the abhorrent values they reflect in the strongest possible terms. As the University’s Board of Trustees recently affirmed, we cannot “tolerate any racial injustices or inequities in our University or in the communities we serve.” We are committed to fostering a community at SMU where every person is valued, and to ensuring racial equality and opportunity for all SMU constituents.

Accordingly, SMU and the Foundation are taking the following steps. First, the scholarship program will be renamed, so it will now be called the Sumners Foundation Scholarship, emphasizing the Foundation’s independent status from Hatton W. Sumners. The scholarship program at SMU was established after the congressman’s death, and therefore without his involvement or input, and this name change will focus on the Foundation’s longstanding commitment to leadership and public service rather than honoring the Congressman. Second, the Foundation has agreed to allow the participation of SMU Law School faculty; the SMU Law School Director of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion; and Sumners Scholars alumni in the selection process determining the candidates invited for selection weekend to ensure a variety of voices and perspectives are brought to the table in making these important awards. The Director of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion will begin her role this year; the SMU Law faculty and Sumners alumni will begin their service next year. Third, SMU commits to honoring the selection criteria, which includes public and community service and academic measures. Scholars will also be required to maintain a class ranking in the top 1/3 of each recipient’s class. Fourth, the plaque honoring Congressman Sumners in the Underwood Law Library will be removed, and Congressman Sumners’ photos and effects will be returned to the Foundation and replaced with a plaque recognizing the Foundation, its mission and its role in creating the scholarship program.

We do not undertake these decisions lightly, or out of a desire to erase the past. But a modern and inclusive university, one that is firmly committed to welcoming students of all backgrounds, must have partnerships that celebrate the values of diversity, inclusion and opportunity for all committed to the practice of law and public service. The University reiterates its gratitude for the support from and important work of the The Sumners Foundation.