



Advocating for safe college dorms

By Joy Lucius

Giving up is not part of Nancy Barrett's DNA – especially when it comes to advocacy for college students.

For over five years, Barrett and members of the Safe Dormitories Association (SDA) have worked to end open visitation between the sexes in the state-sponsored dorms of Mississippi's college campuses.

SDA seeks to eradicate open dorms because such practices condone and allow deeply immoral behavior by young men and women and are a school-sanctioned violation of parental values.

"As Christians," Barrett told *The Stand*, "we know this is spiritual warfare that must be won for the sake of our precious young people who depend on us to protect them."

Barrett and her husband Don, an attorney in Lexington, Mississippi, have three grown children and 10 grandchildren. Both attended the University of Mississippi (Ole Miss), as did Barrett's father, mother, and grandfather. The Barrett children are fourth-generation alumni of the university.

Help needed

During the 2018 fall semester, Barrett and several friends received disturbing reports of boys openly visiting (and even staying) in girls' dorm rooms. These

reports were from girls at Ole Miss and other Mississippi university campuses.

"At first, we were incredulous," she explained, "until we made a few phone calls and realized it was true. The policy was in place in every [public] university."

Barrett illustrated this abhorrent policy through one mother's story about her daughter's experience.

"Excitement and pleasure," said the mom, "were quickly eclipsed by the horror of her roommate's boyfriend in their dorm room. My daughter often had to sleep a few feet away from a boy she hardly knew, who was not fully dressed many times."

Barrett relayed other invasive, harrowing experiences in the bathrooms, hallways, and bedrooms of public university dorms, plus distressing reports

TAKE ACTION

Mississippi residents – Call Lieutenant Governor Delbert Hosemann's office at 601.359.4070 and ask him to support legislation requiring universities to ban "opposite-sex visitation dorms."

Other states – Call state lawmakers and ask them to contact AFA Action (afaaction.net) to obtain model legislation to address this problem.

of discarded packages of morning-after pills and pregnancy tests.

These accounts spurred Barrett and her colleagues to begin questioning open-visitation dorm policies on every Mississippi college campus. They found little help from campus housing officials, school chancellors, or the trustee board of Mississippi's Institutions of Higher Learning.

Barrett recalled, "Since college students spend so much time on mobile devices, I was told that visitation is considered a means for 'meaningful relationships.'"

The Ole Miss housing department spokesman even assured Barrett that having boys in girls' dorms (and girls in boys' dorms) was "what the students wanted."

Advocacy provided

Despite such naivete and apathy, Barrett and her team knew open dorms were not what every Mississippi student wanted. They also realized open-visitation policies were closely linked to higher rates of campus sexual assault and violence.

That's when SDA vowed to advocate for the safety of students – their spiritual and physical safety.

More recently, SDA turned to state lawmakers for help. Yet two separate attempts to pass legislation for safer dorms failed. In 2023, members of the Mississippi House refused to even consider such a bill. In 2024, Barrett turned to the Mississippi Senate, which also failed to introduce a bill to address student visitation policies.

But Barrett and the SDA are undeterred. Moving forward, SDA will be working with AFA Action to pass a model bill that can serve as an example for the rest of the nation.

"Our plans are to keep working to get this message out," she declared, "especially to the Christians who don't seem to understand the gravity of having this policy in our universities." 