

# Miss America Organization apologizes for press release after insulting past participants

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The Miss America Organization has apologized for a scholarship announcement issued Monday, which drew criticism from past pageant contestants and volunteers and continued the more than yearlong "bye-bye bikini" controversy.

The new scholarship added to the Miss America 2020 Competition was overshadowed by a statement toward the end of the news release that detailed why the scholarship's benefactor wasn't allowed to compete in a local MAO pageant in the 1980s.

"In reaching out to the Miss America Organization, the donor made clear the important reason for the generous gift. As a young woman who wanted to compete in a local Miss America competition in the 1980s, she was discouraged by her parents because they believed 'Miss America does not look like us, and an educated woman does not parade around in a swimsuit,'" the news release states.

Tuesday evening, the MAO released a statement addressed to Miss America supporters.

"Yesterday, MAO announced a new scholarship and included a quote from the donor's parents that has offended members of the Miss America community. MAO did not put the quote in the context of the 1980s in which it was spoken and the erroneous stereotypes that were prevalent at that time," the statement said.

The quote attributed to the woman's parents struck a chord with many former Miss Americas and state titleholders who competed during the so-called "1.0" era of the pageant.

Miss America 2018 Cara Mund shared on Instagram a picture of herself competing in the final swimsuit competition, with the caption "female empowerment doesn't mean insulting, alienating, and discrediting the thousands of women who paved the way.... As the last Miss America to ever compete in swimsuit, I am an Ivy League honors graduate, current law student, and proud supporter of ALL WOMEN."

Two former Miss New Jerseys, Brenna Weick and Jaime Gialloreto, also took to social media to share their opinions on the MAO statement.

"There's no correlation between getting an education and wearing a swimsuit," Gialloreto, who was Miss New Jersey 2018, said on Instagram, "also, let's not disrespect every single competitor in this program pre-2.0."

Current MAO CEO Regina Hopper, board chairwoman Shantel Krebs and other unnamed board members participated in MAO pageants with swimsuit competitions.

In June 2018, it was announced by then-CEO Gretchen Carlson, the former Fox News anchor and Miss America 1989, that the competition would no longer include judging the candidates on physical appearance, meaning no more swimsuits. The announcement, which happened in the middle of the state titleholder competition season, drew outrage from pageant organizers and longtime volunteers.

Despite the controversies, the MAO has not wavered from the "2.0" competition format, which is now in effect for state and local pageants.

"We sincerely apologize to our dedicated participants, volunteers and fans. We genuinely hope our misstep does not detract from the intent of this valuable new scholarship or the openness and inclusivity of the Miss America Organization's vision" the statement said.

The \$3000 Equity and Justice Scholarship will be awarded to a Miss America 2020 candidate based on her social impact initiative.

The annual winner of Miss America is awarded a \$50,000 scholarship. Top finalists and participants also receive scholarships ranging from \$25,000 to \$3,000. Other scholarships administered through the nonprofit Miss America Foundation are awarded based on academics, community service and submitted essays by the candidates.

The amounts and number of current number merit-based scholarships are not available on either Miss America website.