Hopkins alumni condemn the wrongful suspension of Charlie Rich

Dear Matt Glendinning, John Roberts, David Baxter and the Hopkins committee of trustees,

We, alumni of Hopkins School, are deeply concerned by the administration’s retaliation against Charlie Rich in response to an off-campus verbal altercation between Rich’s spouse Thabisa and one of their neighbors back in February.

In response to the incident, Hopkins suspended Charlie Rich and barred the couple—Hopkins parents—from campus. In an email to Hopkins faculty, staff and parents regarding the incident, Head of School Matt Glendinning failed to identify any wrongdoing by Charlie Rich, opting instead to make defamatory statements about his spouse—an employee of the city, not Hopkins. In contrast, the city’s response was measured and appropriate; she was issued a warning and required to attend sensitivity training.

Glendinning’s rash decision-making and choice to publicize the incident without due-process raises serious concerns about his leadership qualifications. Banning a current student’s parents from campus without regard to the possible impacts on the child’s mental health and wellbeing is nothing short of irresponsible. Moreover, punishing an employee for the actions of their spouse is draconian and sets a dangerous precedent.

In a video which circulated of the event, the neighbor—Elchanan Poupko—can be heard hurling insults and slanderous accusations at the couple while Rich’s spouse peacefully demonstrates against the war in Gaza, chanting “free Palestine.” Poupko slandered Thabisa’s use of her first amendment rights in her own neighborhood as “Nazi behavior.” Poupko also harassed Thabisa, a black woman who grew up in South African apartheid, for her heritage and repeatedly called South Africa “the world capital of rape and murder.” While Glendinning condemns hateful speech and harassment in his email, his sentiment is rendered empty rhetoric by his refusal to denounce—or even acknowledge—an outside agitator’s inflammatory comments and racist tirade against a member of the Hopkins community.

We reject the notion that criticizing Israel or calling for a ceasefire is inherently antisemitic. The conflation between anti-Zionism and antisemitism is dangerous and poses an existential threat to freedom of political expression, as well as to the safety of Jewish people everywhere. Zionism is a political ideology, not a religion. Furthermore, under Connecticut
General Statutes Section 31-51q, it is illegal for an employer—even a private employer—to discipline or discharge an employee for exercising rights guaranteed under the First Amendment, including freedom of speech.

When students see employees penalized and parents ostracized for their personal thoughts and opinions, they are discouraged from speaking up. The free exchange of ideas is crucial to learning; educational institutions should be places and critical-thinking is welcomed. As alumni, we can all recall times where we encountered different perspectives from our own and engaged in spirited debates with our peers. Those moments were central to our intellectual development, and we would not want to obstruct future generations of Hopkins students from having those same invaluable experiences. Glendinning’s actions go against the very spirit of Hopkins School—its founding mission. Cultivating a culture of silence and self-censorship is no way to bring up hopeful youths.

As Glendinning himself has said, “History is not some inherited set of facts. You yourself are contributing to the writing of history.”

We encourage Glendinning to reflect upon his own words, and to consider if this is the legacy he wants to leave on Hopkins. A true leader is able to recognize and own up to their mistakes in order to move forward and ensure their impact on posterity is a positive one.

Furthermore, Matt Glendinning, John Roberts, David Baxter, the committee of trustees are not the only ones who must be held accountable for this injustice. We must hold ourselves accountable. We call upon all members of the greater Hopkins community—alumni and current students, parents and loved ones of students, faculty and staff—to stand in solidarity with and show support for Charlie Rich and his family.

We, the undersigned, condemn the wrongful suspension of Charlie Rich and pledge to withhold donations until he is reinstated in his position and the administration issues an apology to Rich and his family.
Signatories

*Within 24 hours of publishing our letter, we have collected over 100 signatures. Please note that this is not a complete list of signatories, as our letter continues to circulate and garner support from alumni across classes.

Ayelet Kaminski '22  
Haniya Farooq '22  
Suthi Navaratnam-Tomayko '22  
Kyle Robik '22  
Elio DiMauro '22  
Joey Rebeschi '21  
Rob Lawler '22  
Amy Zhang '22  
Amélie Khiar '22  
Laila Samuel '23  
Dhalia Brelsford '23  
Valeria Strickland '23  
Caroline McCarthy '22  
Shizah Mangi '21  
Dania Anabtawi '21  
Eesha Rao '22  
Anjali Subramanian '22  
Leela DeSilva '22  
Eze Miguel Iheanacho '22  
Gisella Castagna '22  
Tyler Eveland '22  
Owen Lamothe '22  
Izabella Lopez-Kalapir '20  
Abigail Regan '22  
Rhea Abuja '23  
Pearl Miller '22  
Vivian Wang '23

Lola Panagos '21  
Eva Illuzzi '20  
Felipe Pérez '22  
Kc Chustecki '23  
Ava Hamblett '22  
Aisha Nabali '23  
Yash DiMauro '21  
Melody Cui '23  
Sylvia Franz '23  
Kate Seiter '21  
Saira Munshani '20  
Cameron Murray '22  
Joshua Ferreira '23  
Erin Low '22  
Will Schroth-Douma '23  
James Jeffery '22  
Sophia Neilson '23  
Ella Norwitt '21  
Drew Slager '21  
Lily Meyers '20  
Anne Marie Doober '20  
Olivia Wen '20  
Izabella Lopez-Kalapir '20  
Olivia Duan '22  
Yasmin Bergemann '20  
Kate Loffredo '20  
Caroline Asnes '21
Lionel Louis '18
Julia Sotelo-Emery '22
Jacob Ragaza '22
Alejandro Lopez '21
Jasmine Shah '21
Jennifer Rawlings '05
Sofia Schroth-Douma '19
Zack Putnam '18
Sana Patel '19
Erin Ellbogen '19
Kyle Burton '18
Maria Cusick '22
Julia Tellides '20
Kevin Seiter '23
Karyn Bartosic '18
Ashley Chin '19
Nate Fox '03
Sciana Vertusma '23
Drew Mindell '18
Graley Turner '20
James Donovan '19
Kiarra Lavache '18
Yash Thakur '21
Chantel Malin '18
Alexandra Dawson '20
Emma Weiss '16
Dana Carroll '15
Talia Chang '22
Katrina Schmier '19
Ally Wang '20
Isabel Vlahakis '19
Luke Lu '23
Omari Caldwell '16
Alex Kane '18
Grace Barket '18
Andréa Wooten '13
Allison Chun '17
Isabella Feder '18
Julia An '21
Sophia Capobianco '19
Jordan Shand '19
Tatyana Rozetta '17
Emma Breahna '21
Arthur Aiken '22
Caroline Rivera '17
Vivian Wen '20
Lauren Kranzlin '14
Sara Kranzlin '19
Debra Kranzlin '17
Douglas Guilford '19