

ONE HUNDRED NINETEENTH CONGRESS

Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON THE JUDICIARY

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June 26, 2025

Christina Paxson, Ph.D
President
Office of the President
Brown University
1 Prospect Street
Box 1860
Providence, RI 02912

Dear Dr. Paxson:

The Committee on the Judiciary is conducting oversight of the adequacy and enforcement of U.S. antitrust laws and matters concerning civil liberties to inform potential legislative reforms. In April 2025, the Committee wrote to the eight Ivy League institutions, including Brown University, requesting information regarding potential collusion contributing to rising costs of attendance at these elite universities.¹ Recently, Brown filed disciplinary charges against Alex Shieh and other students affiliated with the publication, *The Brown Spectator*, for similarly expressing concerns about Brown's bloated bureaucracy and rising cost of attendance.² We write to request documents and information related to Brown's actions toward Mr. Shieh and *The Brown Spectator*.

On March 18, 2025, Mr. Shieh, a student and reporter for *The Brown Spectator*, began to work on a story about the growing size and scope of Brown's administration.³ As part of his reporting, he requested comments from Brown's 3,805 administrators to better understand their roles and the contributions they make to the University and its students.⁴ Mr. Shieh's inquiry

¹ See, e.g., Letter from Rep. Jim Jordan, Chairman, H. Comm. on the Judiciary, et al. to Christina Paxson, President, Brown Univ. (Apr. 8, 2025).

² See Dominic Coletti, *Brown Fires New Salvo in War Against Student Journalist Over List of DEI Admins*, FIRE (May 6, 2025), <https://www.thefire.org/news/brown-fires-new-salvo-war-against-student-journalist-over-list-dei-admins>.

³ Alex Shieh (@alexkshieh), X (Mar. 18, 2025), <https://x.com/alexkshieh/status/1902064455166652544>; see also *About Us*, THE BROWN SPECTATOR, <https://www.brownspectator.com/about> (last visited June 17, 2025); Jack Nicastro, *Brown University Targets Student Journalist for Emailing Administrators*, REASON (Apr. 1, 2025), <https://reason.com/2025/04/01/brown-university-targets-student-journalist-for-emailing-administrators/>.

⁴ Alex Shieh (@alexkshieh), X (Mar. 18, 2025), <https://x.com/alexkshieh/status/1902064455166652544>.

focused on whether administrative bloat may contribute to Brown's annual cost of attendance, which now exceeds \$90,000.⁵

Two days after Mr. Shieh began his reporting, Brown initiated an investigation, threatening him with charges including for causing "emotional harm" to the administrators, and later filed disciplinary charges against him for "misrepresentation" and the "violation of operational rules."⁶ Following an "administrative review meeting" in which Mr. Shieh pleaded his case, Mr. Shieh was found "not guilty" on all charges, but that did not reverse the harm to Mr. Shieh.⁷ In testimony to the Subcommittee on the Administration State, Regulatory Reform, and Antitrust on June 4, 2025, Mr. Shieh detailed the harms caused by Brown's investigation:

Instead of answering, Brown's response was retaliation. My social security number was leaked. Our website was hacked. And [Brown] launched a disciplinary investigation into a litany of baseless charges such as emotional harm. When they couldn't get me, they charged every single board member of *The Brown Spectator*, an unprecedented attack on student journalism. But we refused to back down and we won our hearings. There was no misconduct, only exposure.⁸

The Committee shares Mr. Shieh's concern about the rising cost of tuition, especially among Ivy League institutions.⁹ The Committee is conducting oversight to examine whether Brown and other Ivy League schools are engaged in anticompetitive pricing practices to inform potential legislative reforms.¹⁰ Mr. Shieh's journalism and his testimony to the Committee helps to inform our oversight. Mr. Shieh explained that the tuition paid by Brown students is "going into an empire of administrative bloat and bureaucracy. Brown employs 3,805 full-time non-instructional staff for just 7,229 undergrads. This is one administrator for every two students. This isn't education, this is bloat paid for on the backs of students and families."¹¹

We are concerned that Brown's decision to file disciplinary charges against Mr. Shieh and hold a misconduct hearing may serve to suppress free speech and discourage others from coming

⁵ See Sean Salai, *Brown Files Charges Against Student Who Sent DOGE-inspired Email*, WASH. TIMES (Apr. 23, 2025), <https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2025/apr/23/brown-files-charges-student-sent-doge-inspired-email/>.

⁶ See Jack Nicastro, *Brown University Targets Student Journalist for Emailing Administrators*, REASON (Apr. 1, 2025), <https://reason.com/2025/04/01/brown-university-targets-student-journalist-for-emailing-administrators/>; Dominic Coletti, *Brown Fires New Salvo in War Against Student Journalist Over List of DEI Admins*, FIRE (May 6, 2025), <https://www.thefire.org/news/brown-fires-new-salvo-war-against-student-journalist-over-list-dei-admins>.

⁷ See Elena Jiang, *Bloat@Brown Creator, Brown Spectator Board Cleared of Student Conduct Violation Charges*, BROWN DAILY HERALD (May 19, 2025), <https://www.browndailyherald.com/article/2025/05/bloatbrown-creator-brown-spectator-board-cleared-of-student-conduct-violation-charges>.

⁸ See *The Elite Universities Cartel: A History of Anticompetitive Collusion Inflating the Cost of Higher Education Before the Subcomm. on Admin. State, Regul. Reform, and Antitrust of the H. Comm. on the Judiciary*, 119th Cong. 32 (2025) [hereinafter *H. Comm. on the Judiciary Hearing*] (statement of Alex Shieh, Student, Brown University).

⁹ H. Comm. on the Judiciary, *supra* note 1.

¹⁰ *Id.*

¹¹ See *H. Comm. on the Judiciary Hearing*, *supra* note 8, at 33–34 (statement of Alex Shieh, Student, Brown University).

forward and asking questions related to Brown's rising costs.¹² The Committee seeks to understand Brown's rationale for attempting to silence a student raising questions about how student and taxpayer dollars are being used.

Accordingly, to advance our oversight, we request that you please produce the following documents and information for the period of March 18, 2025, to the present:

1. All documents and communications between or among employees of Brown University referring or relating to Mr. Shieh's investigative inquiry, Brown University's subsequent investigation of Mr. Shieh, Brown University's decision to file disciplinary charges against Mr. Shieh, or Brown University's adjudication of Mr. Shieh's charges; and
2. All documents and communications referring or relating to the unauthorized disclosure of Mr. Shieh's personally identifiable information.

Please provide these documents and communications as soon as possible but not later than 5:00 p.m. on July 10, 2025. Pursuant to the Rules of the House of Representatives, the Committee on the Judiciary has jurisdiction to conduct oversight of matters concerning "[p]rotection of trade and commerce against unlawful restraints and monopolies" and "[c]ivil liberties."¹³ If you have any questions about this matter, please contact Committee staff at (202) 225-6906.

Thank you for your prompt attention to this matter.

Sincerely,



Jim Jordan
Chairman



Scott Fitzgerald
Chairman

Subcommittee on the Administrative
State, Regulatory Reform, and
Antitrust



Troy Nehls
Member of Congress

cc: The Honorable Jamie Raskin, Ranking Member

¹² See *H. Comm. on the Judiciary Hearing*, *supra* note 8, at 116 (statement of Rep. Jim Jordan, Chairman, H. Comm. on the Judiciary) ("I think [Brown University] [was] trying to make sure no one else would do it in the future.").

¹³ Rules of the House of Representatives R. X (2025).

Dr. Christina Paxson

June 26, 2025

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The Honorable Jerrold Nadler, Ranking Member, Subcommittee on the Administrative
State, Regulatory Reform, and Antitrust