Testimony of Alex Shieh

Submitted to the House Judiciary Subcommittee on the Administrative State, Regulatory Reform, and Antitrust

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I. Introduction

My name is Alex Shieh. I am a rising junior at Brown University, a contributing opinion writer for *The Boston Globe*, the publisher of *The Brown Spectator*, and the creator of Trialhouse.com. This written testimony supplements my oral statement delivered before the Subcommittee. It provides a factual narrative, institutional data, and background relevant to potential antitrust violations, administrative bloat, and the retaliatory culture at Brown University.

II. Executive Summary

- Brown University charges students $93,064 per year in total cost of attendance, one of the highest in the country.[1]

- Despite this, the university operates with a projected $46 million budget deficit for the 2025 fiscal year.[2]

- Employee salaries, wages and benefits are the largest category of university expenses, with a budget of $818 million, 43% of Brown's total budget.[3]

- Brown employs 3,805 full-time non-instructional staff[4] to support 7,229 undergraduates[5] — a ratio of approximately one administrator for every two students.

- A federal lawsuit Brown settled in 2024, *Henry v. Brown University*, alleges collusion among Ivy League institutions in financial aid practices.[6]

- Ivy League schools can drastically improve outcomes for low and middle income students. Yet, low and middle-income students are significantly underrepresented at

[1] "Cost of Attendance," Brown University, accessed June 2, 2025, https://finaid.brown.edu/estimate-cost-aid/cost.
[2] "News from the Corporation Meeting," Brown University, accessed June 2, 2025, https://today.brown.edu/announcements/196191.
[3] "News from," Brown University.
[4] "Employees Factbook," Brown University, accessed June 2, 2025, https://oir.brown.edu/institutional-data/factbooks/employees.
[5] "Employees Factbook," Brown University, accessed June 2, 2025, https://oir.brown.edu/institutional-data/factbooks/employees.
[6] Owen Dahlkamp, "Brown Settles Antitrust Admissions Lawsuit for $19.5 Million," *Brown Daily Herald*, accessed June 2, 2025, https://www.browndailyherald.com/article/2024/01/brown-settles-antitrust-admissions-lawsuit-for-19-5-million.

selective schools, even after controlling for academic qualifications.[7]

- My investigation into administrative bloat at Brown led to university retaliation, including disciplinary charges against me and the entire board of directors of *The Brown Spectator*.

- I urge the Subcommittee to subpoena University President Christina Paxson and investigate anticompetitive behavior and institutional retaliation.

III. Institutional Background and Financial Overview

Brown University, like many of its Ivy League peers, presents itself as a selective meritocratic institution. But according to *The New York Times* data, the median family income of Brown students is over $200,000 — the highest among Ivy League universities. 47% of the student body comes from the top 5% of earners in the U.S.[8] A study by Brown University economist John Friedman confirms that low and middle-income students remain significantly underrepresented at selective colleges including Brown, even after controlling for academic qualifications.[9]

Tuition and fees at Brown have surpassed $90,000 annually. At the same time, Brown is projected to run a $46 million deficit for the current fiscal year, raising concerns about financial stewardship. In contrast, Oxford and Cambridge universities offer comparable or superior education at roughly half the cost, even to American students who do not receive U.K. government subsidies, due to less administrative overhead.[10]

IV. Administrative Structure and Spending

According to Brown's own disclosures, the university employs 3,805 full-time non-instructional staff.[11] With 7,229 undergraduate students, this translates to one non-teaching staff member for every 1.9 undergraduates.[12] These staff do not include faculty members, but rather administrators, consultants, and support staff, many in roles of unclear necessity.

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[7] "How Can We Amplify Education as an Engine of Mobility?," Opportunity Insights, accessed June 2, 2025, https://opportunityinsights.org/education/.
[8] "Economic Diversity and Student Outcomes at Brown University," *The New York Times*, accessed June 2, 2025, https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/projects/college-mobility/brown-university.
[9] "How Can We Amplify," Opportunity Insights.
[10] M.J. Koch, "Brown University Student Who Caused Uproar by Sending DOGE-Style Emails to School's Bureaucrats Is Due To Testify in Congress About Alleged Bloat in Ivy League," *The New York Sun*, accessed June 2, 2025, https://www.nysun.com/article/brown-university-student-who-caused-uproar-by-sending-doge-style-emails-to-schools-bureaucrats-to-testify-in-congress-about-ivy-league-corruption.
[11] "Employees Factbook," Brown University.
[12] "Enrollment Factbook," Brown University.

One academic study has shown that at colleges across the country between 1976 and 2018, while student enrollment increased by 78% and faculty headcount by 92%, administrative staff increased by 162%. Those categorized as “other professionals” increased by 452%.[13] Correspondingly, since 1990, the price of education has risen 181% in inflation-adjusted dollars.[14] One particularly problematic administrative sector is diversity, equity, and inclusion — a political and ideological apparatus that half of Americans oppose,[15] and has jeopardized $510 million of Brown’s federal funding.[16]

Notably, Brown has nearly 50 employees categorized by AI as in DEI-focused roles. Brown also pays its athletic director, Grace Calhoun, over $1 million annually.[17] The Brown Alumni Magazine has seven employees, two of whom are dedicated to advertising.[18] The university president, Christina Paxson, employs a personal household assistant, Maria Raposo.[19] Meanwhile, the student experience continues to deteriorate with dorms flooding during rainstorms and cuts to dining programs, including the replacement of all-beef burger patties with a beef-mushroom blend.

V. Collusion Allegations and Financial Aid Practices

Brown has been named as a defendant in *Henry v. Brown University*, a federal class action alleging collusion among members of the 568 Presidents Group to coordinate financial aid formulas in ways that suppress price competition. Although Brown claims to meet 100% of demonstrated need, it retains the discretion to define what “need” means. These practices disproportionately exclude students from low-income and middle-income families. Brown settled this lawsuit in January 2024.[20]

VI. Retaliation and Journalistic Suppression

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[13] Michael Delucchi et al., "What's That Smell? Bullshit Jobs in Higher Education," *Review of Social Economy* 82, no. 1 (2021), https://doi.org/10.1080/00346764.2021.1940255.
[14] Melanie Hanson, "Average Cost of College by Year," Education Data Initiative, accessed June 2, 2025, https://educationdata.org/average-cost-of-college-by-year.
[15] Bridget Bowman, "Poll: American Voters Are Deeply Divided on DEI Programs and Political Correctness," NBC News, last modified March 18, 2025, accessed June 2, 2025, https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/politics-news/poll-american-voters-are-deeply-divided-dei-programs-political-correct-rcna196377.
[16] Cate Latimer, "Trump Admin to Review U. DEI Policies, Response to Antisemitism as Part of Federal Funding Freeze, White House Official Confirms," *Brown Daily Herald*, accessed June 2, 2025, https://www.browndailyherald.com/article/2025/04/trump-admin-to-review-u-dei-policies-response-to-antisemitism-as-part-of-federal-funding-freeze-white-house-official-confirms.
[17] "Brown University of Providence," ProPublica, accessed June 2, 2025, https://projects.propublica.org/nonprofits/organizations/50258809/202401319349305030/full.
[18] "About the BAM," *Brown Alumni Magazine*, accessed June 2, 2025, https://www.brownalumnimagazine.com/about-the-bam.
[19] "Maria Raposo," Brown University, accessed June 2, 2025, https://directory.brown.edu/uuid/d7d15ae1-4ea7-40c6-a774-8772d31c570a.
[20] Dahlkamp, "Brown Settles."

As an investigative reporter for *The Brown Spectator*, I launched Bloat@Brown, a website that used AI to analyze administrative staff roles and necessity, and Trialhouse.com, a website that performed similar analysis on Columbia University, Cornell University, and the University of Pennsylvania. I emailed each administrator at Brown with a request for comment.

Only 20 responded. One, Jose Mendoza, replied with “Fuck off.” Soon after, the university instructed employees not to respond, and the site was hacked. My social security number was leaked. Associate Dean Kirsten Wolfe initiated a disciplinary process against me, first under charges of "emotional/psychological harm,” “misrepresentation,” “invasion of privacy,” and later for alleged technology policy and alleged trademark policy violations.

Wolfe escalated retaliation by charging the entire board of directors of *The Brown Spectator*. Brown’s actions drew widespread condemnation from figures including Elon Musk,[21] Rep. Troy Nehls,[22] and the Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression.[23] After a formal review, no violations were found and we were cleared.

VII. Recommendations for Congressional Action

1. **Subpoena President Christina Paxson** for testimony and documents related to administrative growth, financial aid coordination, and retaliation.

2. **Investigate the 568 Presidents Group** and the financial aid methodology used by Ivy League schools.

3. **Mandate transparency** in administrative-to-student staffing ratios and compensation for nonprofit universities receiving federal funds.

4. **Protect student journalists and whistleblowers** from institutional retaliation.

5. **Audit nonprofit higher education institutions** with significant administrative spending and tuition increases.

Thank you for your attention to these matters. I respectfully urge this Subcommittee to act in defense of students, families, and the American Dream.

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[21] Elon Musk (elonmusk), "Unreal," X, April 23, 2025, https://x.com/elonmusk/status/1915201907506958842.
[22] Elizabeth Elkind, "Brown University in GOP Crosshairs after Student's DOGE-Like Email Kicks off Frenzy," Fox News, last modified May 2, 2025, accessed June 2, 2025, https://www.foxnews.com/politics/brown-university-gop-crosshairs-after-students-doge-like-email-kicks-off-frenzy.
[23] Dominic Coletti, "Brown University Targets Student Journalist for Sending DOGE-Like Emails," Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression, last modified March 27, 2025, accessed June 2, 2025, https://www.thefire.org/news/brown-university-targets-student-journalist-sending-doge-emails.

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