



Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

May 2, 2025

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

Dear Dr. Paxson,

I write with serious concerns regarding the imminent adverse action taken by Brown University against student Alex Shieh. Reports indicate that Mr. Shieh engaged in a journalistic act of contacting university administrative employees to inquire about their roles and responsibilities. This action, it appears, stemmed from his perspective as a student paying exorbitant tuition and experiencing concerns regarding university facilities, leading him to question the allocation of vast administrative resources.

Penalizing a student for what appears to be an attempt to understand the university's administrative structure and priorities raises serious questions about the institution's commitment to open inquiry and embracing dissenting viewpoints. A university environment should encourage students to seek information and engage in civil discourse, even when it involves questioning its own administrative practices.

Furthermore, disciplinary actions like these taken at Brown University are precisely why many in Congress, including myself as the author of the Endowment Tax Fairness Act, are increasingly concerned about the priorities of elite higher education institutions. When these institutions, which operate in a largely tax-free world, appear more interested in stifling dissenting viewpoints and inquiry into their administrative bloat, it prompts serious questions about their tax-exempt status and how their large endowments contribute to the broader public good. It was therefore reasonable for Mr. Shieh to make this inquiry, and in fact, other students should follow suit.

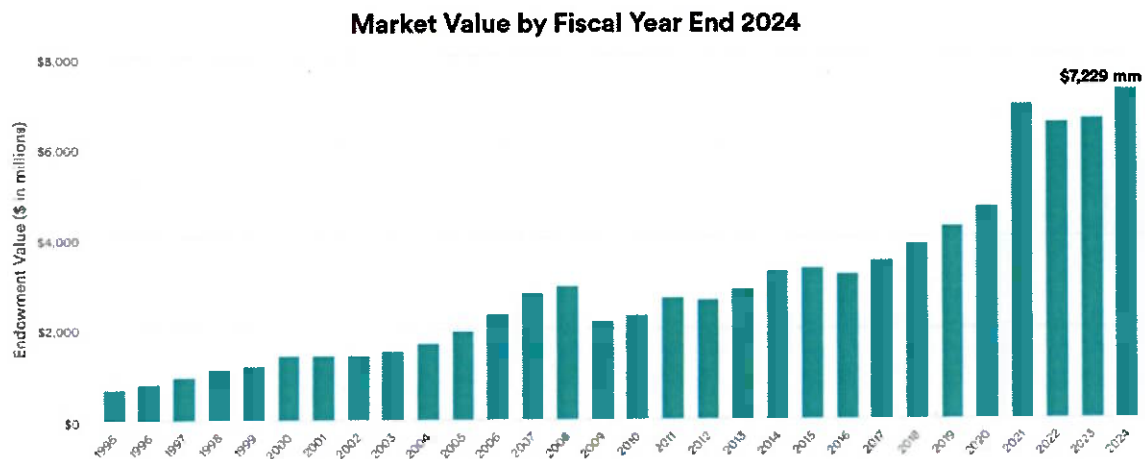
I urge you to reconsider any disciplinary action taken against Mr. Shieh and to reaffirm Brown University's commitment to protecting the free expression of all its students. Additionally, below you can see data from Brown's website, boasting a 10% annual return on its \$7.2 billion endowment. Please explain how these funds are used to improve the student experience or bring down the cost of tuition.

I look forward to your prompt attention to this serious matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "T. Nehls", written over a horizontal line.

Troy E. Nehls
Member of Congress
House Judiciary Committee



Over a trailing 20-year period, the endowment's annualized return of 10% has outpaced the required return of spending plus inflation. Over trailing 3-, 5-, and 10-year periods, the endowment's return places it in the top quartile of college and university peers, according to data maintained by Cambridge Associates.