

Formal Complaint Against Superintendent Bret Champion

Submitted by: Michael Williams, School Board Director
Medford School District
Date: February 16, 2025

On January 23, 2025, my attorneys sent a formal letter to the Board demanding that the restrictions placed upon me be lifted, citing their unconstitutional nature, lack of due process, and retaliatory intent. This letter outlined how the restrictions violated my rights as an elected official and requested mediation to resolve the dispute. However, **on February 5, 2025**, Board Attorney Thaddeus Pauck, in direct alignment with Superintendent Bret Champion, formally denied this request, stating, "That ship has sailed, and his request for an opportunity to respond now, at the meeting on February 6, is therefore denied." Given the Superintendent's continuous refusal to allow for good-faith resolution, I am now filing this formal complaint.

Over the past several months, Bret Champion has used his position as Superintendent to actively engage in a campaign of retaliation against me. Rather than fostering an environment of professionalism and cooperation, he has manipulated policies, encouraged complaints to be filed against me, and worked to limit my ability to function as an elected official. My attempts at dialogue have been ignored, my requests for mediation denied, and Board policies have been selectively enforced against me in a way that undermines both my rights and the integrity of the district.

The timeline of events is critical in understanding the retaliatory nature of these actions. **On July 24, 2024**, I spoke publicly regarding my concerns about the reassignment of SRO Doney. This was a matter of public interest, and I was fulfilling my duty as an elected official. Shortly after my statement aired, I received unsolicited communication (from another Board Director) informing me that efforts, led by Bret Champion and Board Chair Cynthia Wright, were already underway to punish me for speaking out.

Less than two weeks later, **on August 6, 2024**, a formal complaint was filed against me by Ron Havinear. The complaint referenced an event that allegedly took place **on March 12, 2024**, four months prior. If this complaint was based on legitimate concerns, why did Havinear wait until after my public statement to come forward? The timing strongly suggests that the complaint was not brought forward as a neutral grievance, but rather as a direct response to my public comments, coordinated by Bret Champion.

Further supporting this conclusion, I have timestamped communication proving that I was made aware of the complaint days before it was officially filed. There is no reasonable explanation for

how I could have known about the complaint in advance unless someone with knowledge of the plan to file it had alerted me ahead of time. This strongly indicates coordination among Bret Champion, Cynthia Wright, and others seeking to undermine me in retaliation for my public statements.

Despite my continued efforts to de-escalate tensions and find a resolution through mediation and professional discussion, Bret Champion has actively worked against these efforts. Instead, he has imposed restrictions on my ability to perform my duties, used district resources to discredit me, and engaged in actions designed to obstruct my ability to function as a Board Director. These actions, taken as a whole, raise serious concerns about whether Superintendent Bret Champion has abused his authority to retaliate against me for exercising my right to free speech and fulfilling my role as an elected official.

- **July 25, 2024** – I was warned by another Board Director that Superintendent Bret Champion and Board Chair Cynthia Wright were actively working to manufacture complaints against me in an attempt to discredit me. Despite this, I did not respond with accusations but instead continued to seek collaboration.
- **October 15, 2024** – I met with Superintendent Champion to address concerns and find a way forward. However, rather than engaging in a productive discussion, he yelled at me, stopped me from leaving, and escalated the situation into a hostile confrontation.
- **November 15, 2024** – I reached out to Board Chair Cynthia Wright in an effort to discuss a resolution that was respectful, collaborative, and restorative. Instead of a productive conversation, she pressured me to resign, stating that *"the walls are closing in on you"* and that I would face *"serious consequences"* if I did not step down.
- **December 13, 2024** – The Board imposed severe and unprecedented restrictions on my ability to perform my elected duties, requiring me to seek written permission from the Superintendent before visiting schools. This was done without due process and with clear retaliatory intent.
- **December 19, 2024** – I sought clarification on the imposed restrictions and requested an opportunity to address the Board publicly regarding my concerns. I was denied any meaningful opportunity to respond.
- **January 23, 2025** – At the same meeting where I was censured, Board Member Kinsella was caught on an open microphone telling a public commenter to "go f* yourself"**, a blatant violation of Board Policy BBF. Unlike me, he faced no disciplinary action, further demonstrating the unequal application of Board policies.
- **January 29, 2025** – My attorney, Charles Bolen, sent a formal letter to Board Attorney Thaddeus Pauck and Board Chair Cynthia Wright, demanding the removal of the restrictions placed on me and requesting mediation. This was denied in a comment

stating *“That ship has sailed, and his request for an opportunity to respond now, at the meeting on February 6, is therefore denied.”*

- **February 3, 2025** – I emailed Board Chair Wright and the Medford School Board Governance Team formally requesting a reconciliation process and an opportunity to address the Board. I was once again denied any meaningful opportunity to speak.
- **February 5, 2025** – Attorney Thaddeus Pauck responded, stating that the complaints against me had been "fully and finally resolved" and that no mediation or dispute resolution process would be considered. My request to speak at the February 6, 2025 Board meeting was denied.

Despite my persistent efforts to resolve these conflicts professionally and fairly, I have been denied at every turn. Rather than seeking resolution, actions were taken against me. These actions include but are not limited to public discrediting, excessive restrictions, intimidation, and even baseless criminal allegations, and they have only escalated in severity. The current restrictions are an example of the ongoing bullying and retaliation that I will outline in this complaint.

It has become increasingly clear that these measures are not about good board governance or accurate policy enforcement but rather a targeted campaign to suppress, silence, and remove me from my elected role. With no other viable options left to ensure that I can fulfill my responsibilities as a duly elected Board Director without fear of harassment, retaliation, or intimidation, I am left with no choice but to formally submit this complaint.

This is not a step I take lightly, but it is a necessary one to hold those responsible accountable, to protect the integrity of the Board, and to ensure that no other Board member or public servant is subjected to similar abuses of power in the future.

Violations of Board Policies and Request for Investigation

I am submitting this formal complaint against Superintendent Bret Champion for retaliation, harassment, intimidation, and abuse of authority against me in my capacity as a duly elected School Board Director.

Under Policy KL – Public Complaints, I am requesting the removal of the restrictions placed upon me or a formal investigation into his conduct, as his actions appear to violate multiple district policies, including but not limited to:

CBA – Qualifications and Duties of the Superintendent

BCD – Board-Superintendent Relationship

GBNA – Anti-Harassment, Intimidation, and Retaliation

GBC – Staff Ethics

GBD – Board-Staff Communications

His actions include intimidation, retaliation, suppression of my Board duties, and deliberate efforts to discredit my role. Below, I outline these violations along with the relevant policy language that has been violated.

Violations of Policy GBNA – Anti-Harassment, Intimidation, and Retaliation

"The Board is committed to providing a positive and productive learning and working environment. Hazing, harassment, intimidation, menacing, bullying, and acts of cyberbullying of staff, students, or third parties by staff, students, or third parties are strictly prohibited and shall not be tolerated in the district. Retaliation against any person who reports, is thought to have reported, files a complaint, or otherwise participates in an investigation or inquiry is also strictly prohibited."

Creation of Retaliatory and Excessive Restrictions

On **July 25, 2024, at approximately 2:45 PM**, I received a call from another Board Director informing me that they had attended a meeting where Superintendent Bret Champion and Board Chair Cynthia Wright discussed ways to find a complaint to file against me for speaking out publicly.

I was told that they planned to encourage an employee to file a complaint against me, alleging a violation of the Board's code of conduct policy.

On the same day, I have timestamped communication evidence proving that I knew about the complaint before it was officially filed. There was no way for me to have known about this complaint without being forewarned by another party.

On **August 6, 2024**, the complaint was officially filed, referencing an event that occurred on **March 12, 2024**. This sequence of events demonstrates a deliberate plan to use an employee complaint as a weapon against me in retaliation for speaking publicly.

Prior to **December 19, 2024**, Superintendent Champion and Cynthia Wright developed and finalized the language of a Board resolution that would require me to obtain Champion's written permission before visiting any school. On December 19, 2024, the Board voted to pass the resolution, but Board members were not informed of its retaliatory intent.

Public Character Assassination

"Harassment, intimidation, and bullying of staff, students, or third parties is strictly prohibited."

Superintendent Champion, Cynthia Wright, and Communications Director Natalie Herd collaborated to craft a letter to parents and the community stating that I could not be trusted.

The letter included the statement:

"Whether you believe someone who's been in our district a short time, or those who have spent decades in our valley fighting for our kids is up to you."

This intentional effort to discredit me was a direct attempt to damage my credibility and undermine my role as a Board Director.

Physical Intimidation and Abuse of Power

"The district prohibits intimidation or menacing conduct that places a person in fear of harm."

On **October 15, 2024**, I met with Superintendent Champion to discuss issues of great concern. Given prior experiences, I feared that he would attempt to **misrepresent or weaponize our** conversation, so I requested that Board Director Suzanne Messer accompany me as a witness.

During the meeting, I asked Superintendent Champion whether he had spoken with Cynthia Wright about the complaint against me. He admitted that he had, and the conversation quickly became confrontational.

As I attempted to leave the District Office, Superintendent Champion yelled at me, ordered me back into his office, and physically blocked the exit. He then pointed his finger in my face and continued yelling, escalating the conflict instead of de-escalating it. His aggressive body language and verbal intimidation created a hostile and unsafe environment.

False Criminal Complaint as Retaliation

"Retaliation against any person who reports, is thought to have reported, files a complaint, or otherwise participates in an investigation is strictly prohibited."

Superintendent Champion filed a baseless felony complaint against me with the Medford Police Department, falsely alleging that I had brought weapons onto school grounds.

This resulted in a criminal investigation, despite the fact that I have no criminal history and there was no evidence to support the claim.

The complaint was not based on a legitimate safety concern—instead, it was an attempt to weaponize the legal system to retaliate against me for exposing mismanagement and challenging district leadership.

Ultimately, the allegations were proven false, demonstrating that this was a deliberate and calculated attempt to damage my reputation and coerce a resignation.

Request for Action

Given the seriousness of these violations, I request the following:

An immediate removal of any unjustified restrictions placed upon me that were approved or enforced by Superintendent Champion. This is the requested remedy for this complaint. If removal is denied, the following is an alternative to satisfy the complaint:

A third-party investigation into Superintendent Champion's actions, including his role in coordinating complaints and directing retaliation against me.

A full review of his conduct as Superintendent to determine whether he has violated district policy and ethical leadership standards.

A commitment from the Board to ensure that I will not face further intimidation, coercion, or retaliation for fulfilling my elected duties.

Since Superintendent Champion directed district employees Natalie Herd and Thaddeus Glen Pauck in carrying out these retaliatory measures, their actions should be considered as part of his misconduct.

I am submitting this request for a formal Board-level investigation, as these actions interfered with my ability to fulfill my duties as an elected Board Director.

Thank you for your time and attention to this serious matter. I look forward to the Board's response and next steps.

Respectfully,
Michael Williams
School Board Director
Medford School District