

PRESS STATEMENT ON BEHALF OF CHRISTOPHER A. HEALY

December 16, 2022

CONTACT: Stephen H. Brown, attorney for Dr. Healy

STEPHEN H. BROWN, LLC
330 East Coffee Street
Greenville, SC 29601
(864) 272-3424 (Office)
(864) 350-7750 (Cell)
stephen@stephenbrownlawfirm.com

Professor Christopher A. Healy filed a breach of contract civil action against Furman University on December 15, 2022, in the Greenville County Court of Common Pleas. He has alleged breach of his written employment contract because he was suddenly, without notice or explanation, suspended from teaching and banned from the Furman University campus on September 30, 2022. All of this was done by the Furman University administration without initiating any form of a due process hearing to which he is entitled pursuant to Furman University's Faculty Handbook. To this point in time, Furman has failed to identify any conduct that it claims would justify such a suspension of a tenured faculty member. Furthermore, legal action was initiated by Professor Healy yesterday after his good-faith efforts to resolve the dispute were wholly ignored by Furman. The only notice received by Professor Healy from Furman University, at any time, to justify his immediate suspension from service, was an email from the University's Dean of Faculty on September 30, 2022, that stated "this letter serves as notification that you have been placed on paid administrative leave, effective immediately, while the university commences an investigation into the circumstances surrounding recent Twitter posts documenting your attendance at the Unite the Right Rally in Charlottesville, Virginia, on August 11 and 12, 2017. Specifically, the university is investigating whether you have engaged in 'conduct that directly, substantially, and consistently impairs [your] fulfillment of [your] professional responsibilities as a teacher, researcher, librarian and/or faculty administrator' (131.5 B.2)." That same email from the Furman University Dean of Faculty went on to say:

"During the investigation, and effective immediately:

1. you will not teach your current courses;
2. your advisees will be temporarily reassigned;
3. you should not engage with university and/or departmental service obligations;
4. you will not be permitted on campus;
5. you will not engage with students; and
6. you are expected to cooperate fully with individuals conducting this investigation."

Professor Healy was shocked and dismayed by this sudden and unjustified punishment to which he was subjected by Furman University, all without due process and in breach of his written contract of employment. Dr. Healy has taught at Furman University, in the computer science department, since 1999. He was awarded tenure as a member of the Furman University faculty in 2005. Dr. Healy currently serves as the Daniel Distinguished Professor of Computer Science, a position to which he was appointed in 2019. Dr. Healy has committed no crime. He has not perpetrated, nor has he even been accused of perpetrating, any act of violence. Similarly, he has not made, nor even been accused of making, violent statements, threats of violence, or statements inciting violence. Quite simply, Dr. Healy has never engaged in any “conduct that directly, substantially, and consistently impairs” the fulfillment of his professional responsibilities as a teacher at Furman University.

The irony of this case is that despite Dr. Healy’s exemplary and unblemished record of service at Furman University, he was suspended by his employer in violation of the criminal law of the state of South Carolina. Pursuant to S.C. Code Ann. §16-17-560, “It is unlawful for a person to assault or intimidate a citizen, discharge a citizen from employment or occupation, or eject a citizen from a rented house, land, or other property because of political opinions or the exercise of political rights and privileges guaranteed to every citizen by the Constitution and laws of the United States or by the Constitution and laws of this State.” It is a criminal statute which, if violated, upon conviction, subjects the guilty party to a fine of not more than one thousand dollars, or imprisonment for not more than two years, or both. There has unquestionably been an attempt by the administration of Furman University to intimidate Professor Healy because of the exercise of his political rights and privileges guaranteed to him as a citizen. We do not yet know if he will be dismissed from his employment with Furman University. Dr. Healy has heard nothing from Furman University about its investigation into him other than that the investigation is expected to continue into 2023. Furman has already notified Dr. Healy that his class to be taught next semester, beginning in January of 2023, been reassigned to another instructor. The intimidation of Dr. Healy by Furman University, and its impact on his employment there, as a result of his traveling to Charlottesville, Virginia in 2017 to demonstrate political opposition to the removal of a statue of General Robert E. Lee, a man nearly universally regarded as one of the finest commanding generals the United States Military Academy at West Point has ever produced, constitutes criminal action by Furman University.

The facts of this case are quite clear. Professor Healy has engaged in no conduct that impairs his ability to perform his professional duties as a member of the Furman University faculty. All of the actions Furman University has taken against Dr. Healy were in retaliation for political opinions Furman believes he holds, or his exercise of political rights and privileges guaranteed to him by the Constitution and the laws of the United States and the State of South Carolina. Traveling to Virginia, during his summer break, to peacefully demonstrate opposition to the removal of the statue of General Robert E. Lee is a clear example of the exercise of such constitutionally and statutorily protected rights. In contrast to Dr. Healy’s actions, it is the conduct of Furman University, and its administrators, who by breaching Dr. Healy’s contract and knowingly violating state law, have injured the reputation of Furman University as a prestigious institution of higher learning, while intentionally, and needlessly, simultaneously damaging Dr.

Healy's career and professional reputation. Those actions are unbecoming of such a historically noble institution as Furman University, especially in these troubled times in which we now find ourselves, where our community, our state, and our nation, are in desperate need of wise and principled leadership. In our institutions of higher learning, where "academic freedom" has for centuries been a cornerstone of their calling, the chilling and indeed, outright suppression, of free speech, must not be condoned. Dr. Healy recognizes the essential role that free speech plays in our society and will act vigorously, yet lawfully, to oppose the suppression of such rights. He is committed to such a cause. The actions Furman University has thus far taken against Professor Healy are in violation of contract and applicable state law, and are quite simply inexcusable. Dr. Healy looks forward to his distinguished reputation, and his legal rights, being vigorously defended, and ultimately upheld, in a court of law.