



October 2, 2023

Dear members, friends and supporters of the Saint Louis Chess Club,

We are writing to address an important issue. The disturbing allegations against chess grandmaster Alejandro Ramirez – who was associated with the Saint Louis Chess Club beginning in 2011 and served as a chess coach from 2015 until his resignation in March 2023 – have sent shockwaves across the chess community. Since its founding in 2008, the Saint Louis Chess Club has been a trusted leader in the game of chess for all, but especially for women and children, and we are deeply troubled by the allegations and accounts of misconduct by Mr. Ramirez.

Our greatest concern is for those who were assaulted or harassed by Mr. Ramirez, and we are deeply sorry for the pain it caused. We also realize the Saint Louis Chess Club should have done more to address the allegations made by those who bravely came forward with information about his inexcusable behavior.

Following an investigation by our organization, during which time Mr. Ramirez resigned, it was determined he would no longer be allowed on the Saint Louis Chess Club campus or be allowed to participate at any chess-related activities the Saint Louis Chess Club hosts, supports or is affiliated with in any capacity. We also stand behind the decision by US Chess to suspend Mr. Ramirez.

Sadly, these incidents point to a larger issue in the global chess community that must be acknowledged and addressed: the undercurrent of bias and discrimination against female players, which leads to a culture of sexism and harassment. As one of the most powerful and influential organizations in chess, we need to take responsibility and recognize we risk remaining part of this cultural problem unless we take a leadership role in working toward a solution.

We were silent on this very real and important issue for too long – and in doing so – we let down those whom we champion: our students, players, donors and friends. Our failure to use our influence to publicly step up and fiercely advocate for keeping chess safe is a mistake that will not be repeated.

Given our continued and genuine concern regarding this topic, the Saint Louis Chess Club recently hired a new legal team, led by former U.S. Attorney Catherine Hanaway, to review all its guidelines, practices and procedures when it comes to ensuring the safety and security of everyone participating in chess.



The Saint Louis Chess Club is committed to implementing enhanced practices that strengthen our existing guidelines and promote and ensure a safe environment for everyone. These practices include, but are not limited to:

- annual active bystander intervention, anti-harassment and anti-discrimination training for the Board of Directors, and all staff members;
- updated employee handbook to include:
 - Speak Up Policy detailing the importance of reporting concerns, whistleblower protections and anti-retaliation guidelines;
 - enhancements to Policy on Interactions with Minors, requiring comprehensive training and certification for all staff members and individuals associated with the Saint Louis Chess Club who work with minors, and including requiring a second adult present with minors and reporting requirements;
 - new Code of Conduct applying to all staff and Board of Directors;
- enhanced background checks for coaches and all staff having contact with minors;
- adoption of US Chess Federation's Guidelines on Safe Play and Conduct;
- revised Code of Conduct for members, competitive players, resident Grandmasters and commentators;
- creation of a new HR Manager role for an individual – experienced in employee relations, responding to concerns and conducting investigations – who maintains a reporting line to the HR Committee of the Board of Directors;
- instituting an internal investigation policy and procedure, which includes regular reporting to the Board of Directors;
- monitoring by a new safety committee reporting to the Board of Directors – consisting of internal staff and external individuals – to review concerns raised and remedial actions, with a focus on protecting victims;
- implementation of a comprehensive reporting tool maintained by a third-party provider to assist all members, players, coaches, commentators and anyone associated with the Saint Louis Chess Club, along with the public, in reporting concerns confidentially and anonymously if they so choose.

By creating and adhering to these new safety guidelines, the Saint Louis Chess Club remains committed to our mission of creating a world-class venue for players from across the globe to enjoy. This also includes providing a safe environment free from discrimination, harassment, sexual misconduct, hazing, bullying and mental or physical



abuse. We encourage any victim or other persons with information regarding inappropriate conduct to contact Cathy Gallaher, Saint Louis Chess Club HR Manager at cgallaher@saintlouischessclub.org. You may also make a report confidentially – and, if you wish, anonymously – through our ethics reporting hotline managed by Navex as detailed on our website. In addition, if you or a loved one were abused, the Saint Louis Chess Club is offering free, confidential counseling services. Information about accessing these services is available on our website.

We understand that cultural shifts and systemic change can only happen when people and organizations publicly step up and set the example for behavior and expectations. Please know our staff, leadership team and Board of Directors will do everything in our power to continue to make tangible, meaningful changes that foster an equitable environment and help make the Saint Louis Chess Club the safest and best place in the world to play chess.

Sincerely,

The Saint Louis Chess Club Board of Directors