

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR



A Call to Defend Bodily Autonomy in the Mathematics Community

This statement has been abbreviated; view the full text and a list of signatories here: <https://sites.google.com/view/bodily-autonomy-in-math>.

The Supreme Court decision overturning *Roe v. Wade* has a profound impact on the rights of members of our community. We stand with everyone whose rights to medical care including abortions, bodily autonomy, and privacy this reactionary decision attacks.

This decision follows on the heels of escalating attacks on the bodily autonomy of trans people across the US. We are deeply concerned by these rulings' impact on many people in our mathematical community who already face a lack of support for their bodily autonomy, including family planning decisions and access to healthcare, medical leave, and parental support. Moreover, too many departments are hostile to pregnant people, new parents, and trans people, for instance by denying them parental and/or medical leave. This insufficient support and hostility are exacerbated for those in contingent or non-tenure-track positions, including graduate students and staff, and those already oppressed along multiple axes, for example race, gender, sexuality, religious affiliation, ability, or size. These issues are intertwined; departments can and must do more to build structures that support the bodily autonomy and other rights of all of their community members.

In the context of the new attacks on reproductive rights and transgender rights, we call on departments to adopt the following protocol:

- 1) Two weeks of medical leave, no questions asked, per academic term.
- 2) Accessible gender neutral bathrooms, with changing stations, as well as rooms to breast/chest feed and pump.
- 3) Explicit support and information for anyone looking for abortion and/or trans affirming care.

**We invite readers to submit letters to the editor at notices-letters@ams.org.*

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- 4) Parental leave for all department employees including grad students, postdocs, non-tenure-track faculty, and staff, with clear written policies.
- 5) A standing fund to support departmental members who are in need of financial support for childcare or other services to attend conferences, which organizations like the NSF will not support. (See Question 6 in [this Q&A](#).)
- 6) Clear and accessible policies for name changes in all departmental contexts, and support of this process in institutional matters.

When departments are unable to implement these actions without institution-wide approval, we call on them to vocally advocate for these changes within their institutions. The traditional academic trajectory in mathematics is designed to accommodate able-bodied, cis het white men who have familial and spousal support to accommodate their personal needs. It is important for departments to examine how their structures continue to reinforce a culture that punishes child bearers and child rearers, especially in hiring, promotion, and tenure.

Individual mathematicians have a responsibility to act on behalf of the wider community when participating in conferences and visiting colleagues in states that have restricted access to reproductive and gender affirming health-care. We ask that mathematicians who sign this statement commit to the following actions, as applicable:

- 1) As a conference organizer, provide a clear statement of support for abortion care and trans rights and a virtual participation option. This is also an important accessibility concern for disabled and immunocompromised people who may face greater risk and/or difficulty in traveling to in-person events. (See the [Spectra statement](#) for further suggestions related to conference organization.)
- 2) As a speaker, strongly advocate that any conference to which you are invited offers an option for virtual participation.
- 3) As an attendee or when visiting a colleague, donate to a local abortion fund that supports abortion access where you are visiting.

Finally, we are *not* asking for a blanket boycott of conferences in states where abortion and medical care for trans people have been criminalized; such boycotts should not

be implemented without an explicit call from local community organizers. No US state is safe for all marginalized people as the US was built on the genocide and enslavement of Black and Indigenous peoples and the legacy of this history is still very much alive today. Conference organizers should be aware and transparent about the risks that participants take on when attending conferences in different locations.

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Letter to the Editor

While I love Boston, I did not attend this year's JMM as, being unmistakably of Jewish appearance, I was concerned for my safety. Antisemitism is on the rise throughout the country, on college campuses in particular, and unfortunately Boston is Ground Zero. Tufts has drawn attention for this since the mid-2010s. Harvard led the country in antisemitic incidents during the 2021–22 academic year with 25. The Wellesley University student newspaper endorsed the Mapping Project, which publicizes the addresses of Jewish organizations in the Boston area, along with those of anyone who has had contact with them, with their intention to "disrupt" and "dismantle."

Antisemitism differs from other forms of hatred in that there are more calls for violence and that it is found all over the ideological spectrum. There is more excusal, such as celebrities defending other celebrities, than with other forms of hatred. It also leads to people who ignore the plight of the Uyghur Muslims in China (and of the citizens of the 50+ totalitarian regimes in the world) while targeting American Jews, who have no involvement with the Israeli government's policies.

I feel that, if history is an indicator, if the growing antisemitism is not quashed immediately, it will be detrimental to the advancement of mathematics in the United States. Anyone who has studied the history of mathematics knows that while Spain dominated world mathematical activity during the first half of the last millennium, this

ceased after 1492 with the Inquisition. The *Notices of the AMS* had a feature a few years ago about Jewish mathematicians in Germany, accompanied by a graph that showed their active years, most of which tragically ended in the early 1940s. While not as pronounced as in medieval Spain and prewar Germany, Jews in the United States still represent a disproportionate percentage of mathematics faculty and I'm sure that everyone wants their Jewish colleague friends to remain safe (remember that antisemites see Jews who are not (yet) observant and/or non-Zionist as Jews).

While to my knowledge all mathematics departments are still safe, many campuses are not and, based upon news reports, antisemitism is increasing by the day. It is the professors who run the universities in this country, not the students. For the sake of mathematics in this country as opposed to a return to 1493 Spain or 1946 Germany, I am requesting that all mathematics professors, both Jewish and non-Jewish, speak out when they observe antisemitic activity on campus. It cannot just be that the administrations around the country disagree with the views of the students but say that they are entitled to their views. As the adage goes, free speech does not entitle one to yell "fire" in a crowded theater and neither does it entitle the expression of any antisemitic thoughts that can lead to the physical harm of Jews on campus or worse.

Rabbi Marc E. Jacobson, PhD
(retired; last academic appointment Wharton Dean's Fellow,
University of Pennsylvania)

A Beautiful Mind With A Genuine Soul

In loving memory of Prof. James E. Joseph (1937–2022), who passed away peacefully on December 8, 2022. Prof. Joseph was an internationally known topologist. He dedicated his life to mathematics and education.

A beautiful mind with a genuine soul,
Rare a combo but delight to know;
The soul has passed so peacefully,
Leaving those who knew him well
Shocked in grasp, voice that gave
Comfort and counsel now silent!

A student to the core, a teacher to many,
To students, often his silence eloquent,
A listening heart and knowing mind,
Astute, leaves no posturing around.
Saying much with much too little,
Alas, that silence is just silent!

A person who spoke with actions,
James Joseph knew that well.
Dollar bills and checkbook in pocket,
Helping hand for a struggling student

To pay the bills and keep up work,
And to those who make the pavements home.

Topology, and Math in general,
Beautiful mind that rapt them well;
Eager to go in depth seeking elegance
Not knowing limitations, but beauty
With 'limits' and limitless horizon,
Seeking unifying capsule to encompass all.
That fertile mind is no more
To guide, to render, to share!

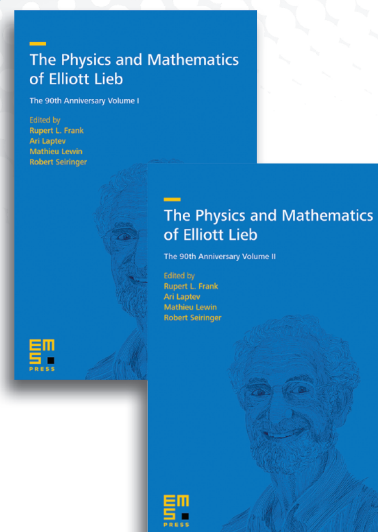
Field of mathematics lost a genius,
To his students, lost a lasting mentor,
To his friends, lost a genuine hand,
To humanity, lost a shining star.
Now he is the Soul, the Spirit,
The Energy which fills us all.
Goodbye Joe, but no Goodbye at all!

*Bhamini M. P. Nayar
Department of Mathematics
Morgan State University
December 11, 2022*

*This was presented at a small gathering of seven of Prof.
Joseph's close friends, paying tribute to him and reminiscing
him on December 21, 2022.*

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These two volumes are dedicated to Elliott Lieb on the occasion of his 90th birthday. They celebrate his fundamental contributions to the fields of mathematics, physics, and chemistry.

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