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## My Turn: St. Paul's School and accountability

By [ALEXANDER PROUT](#) (/byline?byline=By ALEXANDER PROUT)

For the Monitor

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For more than 150 years, St. Paul's School has enjoyed all the resources New Hampshire has to offer without paying a cent in taxes. Quite the opposite, New Hampshire has given the school, which boasts of an endowment of over \$600 million, interest-free loans for the construction of first-class buildings and facilities.

In all, New Hampshire's taxpayers have forked over untold millions of dollars in tax breaks to an institution with far more resources than virtually any school in the state.

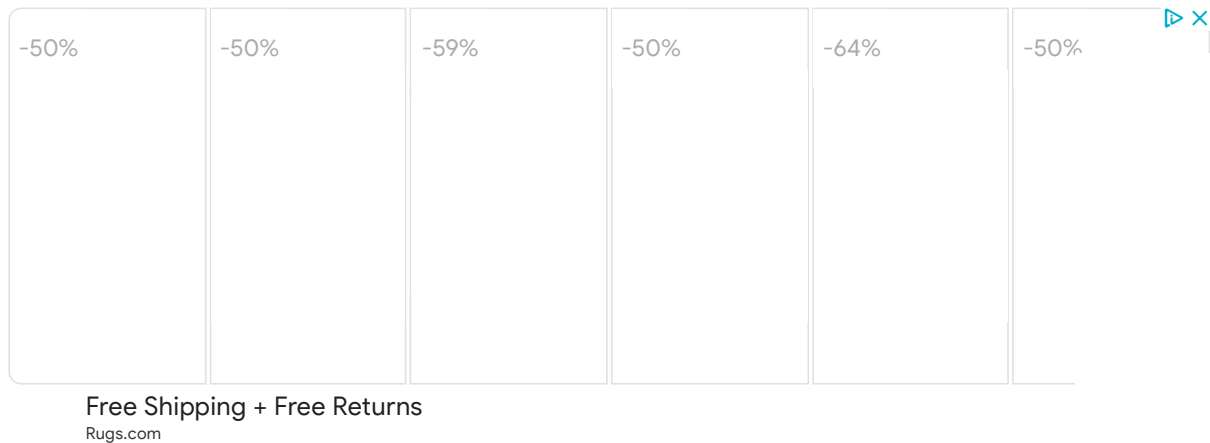
Despite those facts, the wealthy and powerful who run this institution have resisted every attempt by New Hampshire officials to ensure that their private, nonprofit school protect the children who live and learn on its campus.



St. Paul's believes it is above the law. And for most of its history, the school has escaped legal accountability. With little to no oversight, the school failed to protect its students from sexual assault and harassment and permitted the widespread use of drugs and alcohol by the children of America's elite.

The school's cover-up culture led directly to the rape of my daughter, Chessy Prout, as part of a tradition of ritualized statutory rape called the senior salute.

Along with a much broader community of St. Paul's alumni and survivors, I was disappointed and discouraged that the overseer, Jeff Maher, abruptly resigned from his job on Oct. 19 based on the "intolerable workplace environment" the school created for him.



St. Paul's School apparently attempted to treat Mr. Maher as a member of its staff – requiring him to report to its lawyers, blocking his access to information, and requiring him to reveal confidential investigatory findings to school leadership. In other words, the school tried to force Mr. Maher to follow its long-established playbook: intimidate survivors into silence and blame, shame, and gaslight any survivor with the audacity to report in a way that could at all affect its "elite" reputation.

The school's open contempt for New Hampshire's chief law enforcement office is not shocking. It views itself as above the law, and it views you and your leaders as rubes. St. Paul's School's leaders have bet that Attorney General Gordon MacDonald will do nothing but acquiesce to its demands and, based on his statements following Mr. Maher's resignation, they may be right.

While I hope MacDonald will push back against the school's arrogance, I and a growing community of alumni, survivors, and supporters will continue do everything possible to push New Hampshire to hold St. Paul's School accountable in one of two ways: revoke the school's charter and, after paying current and past tax obligations, the school can run itself as a for-profit business; or require St. Paul's School to submit itself to the kind of independent oversight any other New Hampshire nonprofit housing children face, and take steps to protect the children with whose care it is entrusted.

(Alexander Prout lives in Washington, D.C.)

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