

# The Stallman report

October 14th, 2024

Richard Stallman (aka "RMS") is the founder of [GNU](#) and the [Free Software Foundation](#) and present-day voting member of the Free Software Foundation (FSF) board of directors and "Chief GNUisance" of the GNU project. He is responsible for innumerable contributions to the free software movement, setting its guiding principles, organizing political action, and directly contributing to a flourishing free software ecosystem. The majority of Stallman's political activity has been of priceless value to society at large.

However, Stallman has been the subject of numerous allegations of misconduct. Stallman has also incited numerous controversies for advancing a political agenda which normalizes sexual misconduct and advocates for reforming our social and legal understanding of sexual conduct in a manner which benefits the perpetrators of abuse.

On the basis that Stallman has not demonstrated an understanding of his misconduct; has not apologized for allegations of misconduct, alleged or corroborated; continues to publish his harmful political program; and does not acknowledge or apologize for harm done in the course of this program, this report reiterates the position that Stallman should be removed from the board of directors at the Free Software Foundation.

**Content warning:** *This report catalogues and directly quotes hundreds of statements from Richard Stallman of an extremely offensive nature on subjects including rape, sexual assault, child sexual abuse, sexual exploitation of children, and more. Sensitive readers are **strongly advised** to proceed with caution.*

*If you or someone you know has been the victim of sexual violence, help is available. The United States National Sexual Assault Hotline can be reached at 800-656-HOPE (4673), and is available for [live chat online](#) 24/7. You can speak to a trained expert for confidential support at any time.*

*International readers are directed to [HotPeachPages](#) for resources in your location and your language, and [Child Helpline International](#) provides international resources specifically aimed at the needs of children and young people.*

To support this case, we have catalogued the following:

1. Primary sources documenting Stallman's political advocacy for:
  - The normalization of sexual relations between adults and minors [\[1\]](#)
  - Defense of individuals both accused and convicted of sexual crimes, including the rape of minors, sexual assault, and sexual harassment [\[2\]](#)
  - Dismissal of legal norms regarding sexual assault [\[3\]](#)
  - Dismissal of legal norms regarding sexual harassment [\[4\]](#)
  - Support for the possession of child sexual abuse material [\[5\]](#)
  - Legal and social normalization of sex between humans and animals [\[6\]](#)
  - Legal and social normalization of sex with corpses (necrophilia) [\[7\]](#)
2. Credible allegations of sexual misconduct regarding Stallman [\[8\]](#)
3. Misconduct of the Free Software Foundation board of directors [\[9\]](#)
4. Calls from the free software community for Stallman's removal [\[10\]](#)
5. Recommendations for reconciliation and closure [\[11\]](#)

## Statement regarding Stallman's medical situation

We understand that Richard Stallman was diagnosed with follicular lymphoma in 2023.<sup>1</sup> We are pleased to hear that his prognosis is good and his cancer is in remission. We wish Stallman good health, a peaceful recovery, and many more years of health.

We are not of the opinion that Stallman's cancer diagnosis absolves him of responsibility for his actions, past and present. We urge Stallman to reconsider his controversial political positions and issue retractions and/or apologies to the extent that his health permits him to do so, and draw attention to the fact that Stallman continues to forward his controversial views following his diagnosis. We also urge the free software community to hold Stallman accountable for his actions and to contend with our history of sexism and tolerating abuse.

## **Why publish this report?**

Richard Stallman has a profound influence on the free software community and our movement. He is responsible for defining the four freedoms that steer us, he has written all of our principal philosophy, he founded our foundational software projects, and he is venerated as our ideological leader.

Richard Stallman has also embarked upon a decades-long political project to normalize sexual violence. Under his ideological leadership, the free software movement is unsafe, particularly for women. Women represent just 3% of the free software community,<sup>2</sup> compared to 23% of industry programmers generally.<sup>3</sup> This is no accident. There is a pervasive culture of sexism and a stark lack of accountability in free software, and it begins with Stallman's unchallenged and reprehensible behavior.

The case against Stallman is clear, and yet the free software community has failed to act, in particular at the level of institutions and leadership but also in the form of grassroots support for Stallman. Many defenses of Stallman rely on a comfortable ignorance: ignorance of the scope and depth of Stallman's political campaign against women and victims of sexual violence, or a comfortable belief that Stallman ceased his problematic behavior following his 2021 re-instatement in the Free Software Foundation. Some believe that Stallman's speech has not caused material harm, or that his fringe views are not taken seriously; we provide evidence to dismiss all of these arguments in this report.

Ignorance of the case against Stallman is due in part to the scattered and disorganized nature of information regarding Stallman's misconduct. Many of those who raise a defense of Stallman have heard one or two uncorroborated allegations of misconduct or one or two examples of years-old problematic quotes, and understandably find it easier to excuse it as such. Furthermore, those most directly accountable for Stallman's behavior are the members of the Free Software Foundation board of directors, and their misconduct in handling the case is not widely known; this report brings this misconduct to light. By carefully organizing information about Stallman's misconduct and the misconduct of the FSF board of directors into a single, comprehensive and exhaustively cited report, the appeal to ignorance is no longer applicable.

This report collects hundreds of primary sources from 2003 to 2024 which clearly demonstrate Stallman's harmful political program and misconduct, meticulously cataloged, analyzed, and subject to factual rebuttals. If the free software community cannot address the blatant misconduct of Richard Stallman in the face of overwhelming evidence, the free software community is not safe, and cannot be made safe. Our institutions and our community must act. We have made several recommendations for such actions at the end of the report.

First, we will justify our unqualified condemnation of Richard Stallman.

## **Stallman's political statements**

Richard Stallman maintains a collection of political notes on his website.<sup>4</sup> He frequently

publishes short political opinions on his website here on a wide variety of topics. In this report we draw attention to his political program on sex, drawing from his political notes as a primary source.

Note that all quotes sourced from Stallman’s website for this report are direct quotes of material publicly available at the time this report was prepared in September 2024.<sup>5</sup> You may click any citation to view it on Stallman’s website.

## Analysis of Stallman’s published comments

We have catalogued comments published by Stallman, mostly in the political notes section of his personal website, and categorized comments of interest. Each link leads to a page which provides a complete list of comments applicable to each category. Some comments have been reproduced in multiple categories.

Category	Dates applicable	Occurrences		
		Total	Retracted	
			Yes	No
<a href="#">Distinction between "children" and other minors</a>	2003-2024	124	n/a	
<a href="#">Support of child sexual abuse material</a>	2003-2019	55	0	55
<a href="#">Defense of sexual misconduct</a>	2006-2023	37	1	36
<a href="#">Support of sex between adults and minors</a>	2006-2019	34	5	29
<a href="#">Misrepresentation of sexual assault</a>	2015-2024	24	1	23
<a href="#">Misrepresentation of sexual harassment</a>	2014-2018	13	0	13
<a href="#">Support of bestiality</a>	2003-2018	12	0	12
<a href="#">Support of necrophilia</a>	2003-2013	3	0	3

## Normalization of sexual relations between adults and minors

Richard Stallman has consistently advanced the political position that minors can consent to sex with adults. Stallman’s position on minors having sex with adults is the only position addressed in this report for which Stallman has issued a retraction:

*Many years ago I posted that I could not see anything wrong about sex between an adult and a child, if the child accepted it.*

*Through personal conversations in recent years, I’ve learned to understand how sex with a child can harm per<sup>6</sup> psychologically. This changed my mind about the matter: I think adults should not do that. I am grateful for the conversations that enabled me to understand why.*

– [stallman.org, 14 September 2019 “Sex between an adult and a child is wrong”](#)

However, as we will show, Stallman’s retraction is misleading and does not cover the majority of his past statements on the subject. In short, we will show that Stallman’s 2019 retraction only addresses his views regarding sex between adults and pre-pubescent minors, and this retraction does not account for minors above the age of 12 or 13.

Our report catalogues 34 political comments from Stallman making a political case for sexual relationships between adults and minors. A strict reading of the retraction applies it only to the singular political note that it references, which Stallman has updated accordingly:

► This quote is covered by Stallman's 2019 retraction. Click to show.

*[Blurred text area]*

Stallman has not updated similar comments with the same retraction. However, in good faith we have assumed that the retraction applies to any comments which would apply to minors under the age of 12 or 13, or explicitly refers to "children". Accounting for this, our catalog of Stallman's 34 comments in support of sex between adults and minors indicates that four have been fully retracted and one has been partially retracted.

#### [Appendix: Stallman on sexual relations between adults and minors](#)

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We justify our interpretation by citing 124 primary sources in which Stallman insists on a distinction between "children" and other minors, in particular teenagers. Our sources are dated from 2003 to 2024; Stallman has emphasized that teenagers are distinct from "children", on average, once every 9 weeks since 2003. Stallman has made this distinction 42 times following his 2019 retraction, an average of once every 6½ weeks since the retraction.

#### [Appendix: Stallman's idiolectical use of "child"](#)

To understand Stallman's remarks on sexual relationships between adults and minors, we must show how Stallman distinguishes between "children" and other minors.

Stallman is particular about his use of language, and a reading of his political notes must be paired with an understanding of his idiolect. Stallman uses numerous unconventional definitions and terminology in his political notes and does so with rigour and consistency. In order to assist the reader in interpreting Stallman's political notes, he provides two resources on his website: a glossary<sup>7</sup> and an "anti-glossary"<sup>8</sup>.

Consider the following political note:

*The company Dataminr tries to scan all posted tweets to find anything suggestive of possible violent intent, and report it to the thugs.*

– [stallman.org, 16 October 2020, "BIBO: company reports tweets to thugs"](#)

Out of context, the reader may be confused as to who the "thugs" are. The glossary answers:

**Thugs:** *the armed, usually uniformed marauders that attack protesters and blacks, and make false accusations against them.*

*Usually only a few thugs commit the physical violence, but when one thug makes a false accusation, the rest lie to support it. That's why they deserve the term "thugs" as a group. They are so habituated to perjury that they have their own word for it: "testilying".*

*A few members of thug departments are upright and refuse to support the others' lies. They are the honorable exceptions, and I express my respect for them by calling them "police officers".*

– [stallman.org, "Glossary"](#)

It follows that when Stallman says the word "thug", he is referring to the police, and indeed his use of the word "thug" is consistent with this in thousands of his political notes. Many banal words and phrases are given a similar treatment in his political notes and the two glossaries serve as a guide for readers to interpret and understand his political notes as such.

Notably, the following definition also appears in Stallman's anti-glossary:

**Children:** *Humans up to age 12 or 13 are children. After that, they become adolescents or teenagers. Let's resist the practice of infantilizing teenagers, by not calling them "children".*

– [stallman.org, "Anti-Glossary"](#)

That Stallman's use of the word "child" is consistent with this idiolectical definition and is re-enforced throughout Stallman's political notes. He has drawn a distinction between children and teenagers numerous times, which this report catalogues in an appendix.

[Appendix: Stallman's idiolectical use of "child"](#)

Stallman has made this distinction most recently in June 2024:

*Please do not use the word "children" or "child" to refer to anyone under age 18. A 17-year-old is not a child. A 13-year-old is a teenager.*

– [stallman.org, 16 June 2024 "Online addictive-feeds law NY"](#)

Stallman's insistence on distinguishing children from other minors, in particular teenagers, is often made with sexual overtures. For example, in December 2023:

*The intended purpose of that law is to prevent minors from accessing porn sites. To exclude everyone under 18 is unreasonably strict. They try to justify this by referring to all minors as "children". Even a person of age 17 is a "child" according to them.*

*To exclude only children – real children – from porn sites might be ok in principle. But how to determine whether a given user is under the specified age? The methods mentioned in the article either directly require a user to identify perself, or indirectly require per to make perself vulnerable to being identified.*

– [stallman.org, 6 December 2023 "UK age verification for porn sites"](#)

Or in April 2018, explicitly making this distinction in support of sexual activity between adults and minors (denying the experience of two rape victims in the process, see [defense of sexual misconduct](#)):

*It sounds horrible: "UN peacekeepers accused of child rape in South Sudan." But the article makes it pretty clear that the "children" involved were not children. They were teenagers.*

*What about "rape"? Was this really rape? Or did they have sex willingly, and prudes want to call it "rape" to make it sound like an injustice? We can't tell from the article which one it is.*

*Rape means coercing someone to have sex. Precisely because that is a grave and clear wrong, using the same name for something much less grave is a distortion.*

– [stallman.org, 30 April 2018 "UN peacekeepers in South Sudan"](#)

This report considers Stallman's idiolectical use of "child", established in his "anti-glossary" and re-enforced throughout his political notes, supports the interpretation that his retraction only addresses sexual relationships between adults and children up to the age of "12 or 13", and that political notes which remark upon sexual relationships between minors above the age of 12 or 13 are not covered by his 2019 retraction.

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We now offer a rebuttal of Stallman's political position regarding sexual relations between adults and minors.

[Appendix: Stallman on sexual relations between adults and minors](#)

Sexual relationships between adults and minors are prohibited by social and legal norms because a differential of life and sexual experiences between adults and minors enables adults to manipulate minors for the purpose of sexual gratification. This bears out in statistics that highlight the risks sexual relationships with adults impose on young girls in particular.

Older men often manipulate minors into unsafe sexual practices, leading to undesirable outcomes for their victims. Young girls are often unprepared to negotiate the use of contraception with an older partner, resulting in teenage girls having unprotected sex at a rate that increases by 11% for each year older their partner is. (Manlove, Ryan, Franzetta 2007)<sup>9</sup> Minors who have sexual relationships with partners 5 or more years older are 3.7 times more likely to experience an unwanted pregnancy (Planned Parenthood, 2004; Darroch et al., 1999)<sup>10 11</sup> and twice as likely to acquire a sexually transmitted infection (STI) than peers who have partners similar in age (Ryan, Franzetta 2008).<sup>12</sup>

Young women aged 15 to 17 who have had a relationship with a partner five years or older than themselves have been forced to have sex at twice the rate of young women who have only had similar-age relationships (Darroch 1999).<sup>11</sup> Minors who experience these rapes have poorer life outcomes than their peers; women who are raped before the age of 18 are twice as likely to be raped in adulthood (Tjaden, Thoennes 2000)<sup>13</sup> and experience significantly higher incidences of domestic abuse, mental health problems, low self-esteem, and long-term intimacy problems in adulthood (Flemming et al 1999).<sup>14</sup> Abuse involving sexual intercourse increases this risk by a factor of two (Flemming et al 1999).<sup>14</sup>

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*Note on the sexual abuse of young men:*

*This report does not deny the experiences of young men who are victims of sexual abuse. However, young heterosexual women are at a much higher risk of exploitation than young heterosexual men (about 5× higher). The academic literature tends to focus on the experiences of heterosexual young women as a result, creating a gender bias that is unfortunately reproduced in our report due to a lack of reliable sources. However, it is noted by Manlove et al. that young boys who have sex before the age of 16 with an older partner are more than twice as likely to father a child as a teen than young boys with similar aged partners.*<sup>9</sup>

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Stallman often makes the claim that it is normal for adults to be sexually attracted to minors. On one occasion he has likened condemnation of this attraction to homosexual conversion therapy:

*Research found that men generally find females of age 18 the most attractive.*

*This accords with the view that Stendhal reported in France in the 1800s, that a woman's most beautiful years were from 16 to 20.*

*Although this attitude on men's part is normal, the author still wants to present it as wrong or perverted, and implicitly demands men somehow control their attraction to direct it elsewhere. Which is as absurd, and as potentially oppressive, as claiming that homosexuals should control their attraction and direct it towards to the other sex. Will men be pressured to undergo "age conversion therapy" intended to brainwash them to feel attracted mainly to women of their own age?*

– [stallman.org](http://stallman.org), 21 August 2018 "Age and attraction"

The presumption that adult attraction to minors is "normal" is difficult to characterize. The prevalence of adults with an attraction to post-pubescent minors is unknown. The prevalence of adults with an attraction to pre-pubescent minors is better studied, but poorly estimated; estimates for men are generally around 5% (Seto 2009).<sup>15</sup> However, the editors note that pedophilia is understood as a psychological pathology by the medical literature and is noted as such by its inclusion in the DSM-5 (American Psychiatric Association, 2013).<sup>16</sup>

Additionally, it is factually incorrect to assume that sexual abuse of minors is motivated



by a sexual attraction to minors. Studies show that only about 50% of sexual exploitation of minors is motivated by sexual attraction.

*Although this preference increases the risk of engaging in CSA, only about 50% of all individuals who do sexually abuse children are pedophilic (Blanchard et al., 2001; Schaefer et al., 2010) and not every pedophilic individual actually has abused children. The other 50% of individuals that have abused children are those who do so without a sexual attraction to children; i.e., they lack the necessary social skills to develop and maintain emotional and sexual relationships with appropriately aged peers and look to "replacement partners" in children as a kind of "surrogate" (Beier, 1998; Seto, 2008; Mokros et al., 2012b). (Tenbergen et al, 2015)<sup>17</sup>*

## Defense of sexual misconduct

Stallman's political notes frequently respond to news articles about sexual crimes by downplaying the severity of the crime and advocating on behalf of the offender. Stallman's political notes consistently contribute to a broader harmful discourse which silences the experiences of victims of sexual violence.

This report catalogues 37 examples of Stallman expressing a defense of individuals accused of or convicted of sexual harassment, sexual assault, or rape (statutory or otherwise). The report only considers occasions where Stallman acknowledges or assumes that the sexual act took place, or presents his arguments as if it had taken place. We have omitted other occasions where Stallman does not presume the act had taken place, for instance occasions where Stallman emphasizes the presumption of innocence in legal proceedings.

### [Appendix: Stallman's defense of sexual misconduct](#)

Among these sources we have identified at least 567 separate victims of sexual misconduct whose experience was downplayed or dismissed by Stallman.<sup>18</sup>

It is demonstrable that Stallman's defenses of sexual misconduct cause material harm to victims. Rhetoric which denies or downplays a victim's experience of sexual misconduct causes harm:

*One of the most important factors that predicts severity of post-trauma symptomatology in any rape victim is the post-trauma response received from the environment. For example, where a victims' experience of rape is ignored (deliberately or as a result of people simply not knowing), not recognised, minimised, or both; and where victims are blamed, judged as culpable, met with further violence, violation, or both. Lack of empathy and understanding can, therefore, reduce the prospects for a recovery. (Mason, Lodrck 2013)<sup>19</sup>*

The symptoms of complex post-traumatic stress disorder (CPTSD) in victims of sexual assault which are exacerbated by rhetoric similar to Stallman's are severe. It is also noted that the symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder in sexual assault victims are exacerbated if the victim is very young.

*Post-traumatic stress disorder is an extremely distressing and disabling condition. Intrusive symptoms such as flashbacks, nightmares and feeling as though the assault is reoccurring are profoundly upsetting to individuals who experience them. Their psychological response is often to become avoidant of thoughts, feelings, places and other reminders of the assault. (Mason, Lodrck 2013)<sup>19</sup>*

Exposure to Stallman's rhetoric not only harms the victims of the incidents to which he refers, but also harms victims of similar experiences which are exposed to his remarks.

Stallman's defenses of sexual misconduct rely on a number of recurring premises. A

common defense relies on Stallman's insistence that minors over the age of 12 or 13 are sexually mature and can meaningfully consent to having sex with an adult. Consider Stallman's remarks on the case of Cody Wilson:

*Cody Wilson has been charged with "sexual assault" on a "child" after a session with a sex worker of age 16. (...)*

*The article refers to the sex worker as a "child", but that is not so. Elsewhere it has been published that she is 16 years old. That is late adolescence, not childhood.*

*Calling teenagers "children" encourages treating teenagers as children, a harmful practice which retards their development into capable adults.*

*In this case, the effect of that mislabeling is to smear Wilson. It is rare, and considered perverse, for adults to be physically attracted to children.*

*However, it is normal for adults to be physically attracted to adolescents. Since the claim about[sic] Wilson is the latter, it is wrong to present it as the former.*

– [stallman.org, 23 September 2018 "Cody Wilson"](#)

Laws regarding rape are more general than cases of outwardly apparent coercion. We have provided a general rebuttal of Stallman's political position on sexual relations between adults and minors [elsewhere in the report](#).

Other defenses of sexual misconduct by Stallman focus on an insistence on appropriate use of language in order to establish the "gravity" of the crime in order to determine how the public should "judge" an offender. This defense is often associated with Stallman's fixation on the term "sexual assault", which we cover [elsewhere in this report](#).

*Jelani Maraj (who I had never heard of) could be imprisoned for a long time for "sexual assault". What does that concretely mean?*

*Due to the vagueness of the term "sexual assault" together with the dishonest law that labels sex with adolescents as "rape" even if they are willing, we cannot tell from this article what sort of acts Maraj was found to have committed. So we can't begin to judge whether those acts were wrong.*

*I see at least three possibilities. Perhaps those acts really constituted rape — it is a possibility. Or perhaps the two had sex willingly, but her parents freaked out and demanded prosecution. Or, intermediate between those two, perhaps he pressured her into having sex, or got her drunk.*

– [stallman.org, 13 November 2017 "Jelani Maraj"](#)

In this comment, Stallman belittles the experience of a rape victim<sup>20</sup> and argues for the following positions:

1. Adolescents can consent to sex with adults ([rebuttal](#))
2. Pressuring someone into sex is an "intermediate" offense between overtly consensual sex and sexual assault.
3. Making someone drunk for the purpose of sexual assault is "intermediate" offense between overtly consensual sex and sexual assault.

This is an example of Stallman's regular insistence that sexual crimes be discussed in highly specific language for the purpose of establishing the gravity of the crime so that the public may judge the offender by measures.

Moreover, in this respect Stallman's defenses of sexual misconduct are based on a dismissal of the importance of consent. Stallman consistently defends scenarios where he presumes consent due to a perceived absence of violent coercion.



This form of defense also appears in Stallman's frequent defenses of Julian Assange.

*Personal attacks against Julian Assange are used to distract attention from the heroic achievements of Wikileaks.*

*Ironically, this article itself exaggerates criticism of Assange by stating that the allegations against him consist of "rape" — they do not.*

– [stallman.org](http://stallman.org), 2 July 2012 "Attacks"

The editors acknowledge that the political circumstances surrounding allegations of sexual misconduct by Julian Assange may represent due cause to doubt the allegations. However, we draw attention to the fact that Stallman does not argue from a presumption of Assange's innocence, but rather from an objection to the presumed act being classified as rape.

Among other accusations, one of the presumed acts is that a woman woke up to discover Assange having unprotected sex with her as she slept. The two had had consensual sex the prior evening on the condition that Assange used a condom. We can conclude that Stallman dismisses the conditional nature of the victim's consent regarding condoms, and argues that the consent agreed upon on the prior evening "carries over" to sex with a sleeping victim the following morning. Stallman made this clear on August 12th, 2012:

*If Assange had sex with a sleeping woman, the morning after they had sex and then slept together, was that rape? MP George Galloway says no.*

*Waking up your lover with sex is a tradition that has given pleasure to many, and prohibiting it by designating it as rape is absurd. If that's what the law says in some country, that law is absurd.*

– [stallman.org](http://stallman.org), 21 August 2012 "Assange"

We also identify one additional theme in Stallman's defenses of sexual misconduct, which are based on an outright misrepresentation of the events concerned. For example, in response to a case where Ohio State athletics teacher Dr Richard Strauss was revealed to have sexually abused 177 students over the course of 20 years, Stallman writes the following:

*Should we accept stretching the terms "sexual abuse" and "molestation" to include looking without touching?*

*I do not accept it.*

– [stallman.org](http://stallman.org), 11 June 2019 "Stretching meaning of terms"

The article Stallman cites includes the following quote:

*Many of Strauss's accusers who have spoken publicly said they were masturbated or otherwise touched inappropriately during physical exams or leered at in the locker rooms.*

– [The Guardian](http://TheGuardian.com), 17 May 2019

We also cite the following example from December 2017:

*Mormon feminists are challenging sexual abuse in the Mormon church, which combines with scorn for women that aren't "chaste" to cause great suffering.*

*There are fathers that rape their daughters — and there are also "recovered memory therapists" that implant false memories of childhood sexual abuse that didn't happen. A priori, either one could have happened here. The fact that Carol did not remember the abuse until she worked with a therapist makes me suspect the latter. It seems that Carol's sister also need "help" to*

remember.

*I hope there is a way to determine which one really occurred.*

– [stallman.org, 1 December 2017 "Mormon sexual abuse"](https://stallman.org, 1 December 2017 )

In this example, Stallman invokes "recovered memory therapists", which is not referenced in the cited text, to sow doubt on the stories of Mormon survivors of rape.

## Dismissal of legal norms regarding sexual assault

We have catalogued 24 primary sources in which Stallman misrepresents or downplays sexual assault between 2015 and 2024 as part of a broader political program that aims to dismiss the experiences of victims and erode social and legal norms around sexual assault.

### [Appendix: Stallman on sexual assault](#)

Like "children", in Stallman's speech "sexual assault" is an idiolectical term which Stallman defines in his "anti-glossary":

**Sexual assault:** *The term is applied to a broad range of actions, from rape on one end, to the least physical contact on the other, as well as everything in between. It acts as propaganda for treating them all the same. That would be wrong.*

*The term is further stretched to include sexual harassment, which does not refer to a single act, but rather to a series of acts that amounts to a form of gender bias. Gender bias is rightly prohibited in certain situations for the sake of equal opportunity, but that is a different issue.*

*I don't think that rape should be treated the same as a momentary touch. People we accuse have a right to those distinctions, so I am careful not to use the term "sexual assault" to categorize the actions of any person on any specific occasion.*<sup>8</sup>

The gross misrepresentation of sexual harassment in this quote is not lost on the editors, and is covered in the next section in detail.

Sexual assault is more accurately defined as an assault of a sexual nature. It refers to an act of assault – an unwanted physical interaction – with sexual motivations. The United States National Center for Victims of Crime provides the following explanation:

*Sexual assault is an act of forcing another person into sexual activity against his or her will. Sexual assault takes many forms, including rape or attempted rape, as well as any unwanted sexual contact. The crime includes forced sexual intercourse (rape), sodomy (oral or anal sexual acts), child molestation, incest, fondling, and attempted rape.*<sup>21</sup>

Stallman has misrepresented sexual assault many times. For instance, in October 2023, Stallman writes the following:

*I warned that the stretchable term "sexual assault", which extends from grave crimes such as rape through significant crimes such as groping and down to no clear lower bound, could be stretched to criminalize minor things, perhaps even stealing a kiss. Now this has happened.*

*What next? Will a pat on the arm or a hug be criminalized? There is no clear limit to how far this can go, when a group builds up enough outrage to push it.*

– [stallman.org, 15 October 2023 "Sexual assault for stealing a kiss"](https://stallman.org, 15 October 2023 )

In this note, Stallman cites the case of Luis Rubiales, who was under investigation for

kissing a female football player on television as part of a series of incidents called the “Rubiales affair”, for which Rubiales was indicted on criminal charges of sexual assault and faces a potential prison sentence.<sup>22</sup>

The idea of “stealing a kiss” is a familiar refrain for Stallman’s program speaking against social and legal norms around sexual assault. In 2019, he writes:

*If it is true that he persistently pressured her to kiss him, on stage and off, if he stuck his tongue into her mouth despite her objections, that could well be sexual harassment. He should have accepted no for an answer the first time she said it. However, calling a kiss “sexual assault” is an exaggeration, an attempt to equate it to much graver acts, that are crimes.*

*The term “sexual assault” encourages that injustice, and I believe it has been popularized specifically with that intention. That is why I reject that term.*

– [stallman.org](https://stallman.org), 30 July 2019 “Al Franken”

“Stealing a kiss” is the least “grave” of the acts Stallman questions the legitimacy of the label of sexual assault, but Stallman has also questioned its use for incidents such as the rape of minors.<sup>23</sup> It is this “gravity” that Stallman fixes on when questioning sexual assault, which he wishes to understand for the purpose of how he, and the reader, should “judge” the offender.

*Due to the vagueness of the term “sexual assault” together with the dishonest law that labels sex with adolescents as “rape” even if they are willing, we cannot tell from this article what sort of acts Maraj was found to have committed. So we can’t begin to judge whether those acts were wrong.<sup>20</sup>*

– [stallman.org](https://stallman.org), 13 November 2017 “Jelani Maraj”

This line of questioning is precisely the wrong response to news of sexual assault. The vagueness of the term as presented to the public is deliberate; it protects the privacy of both the victim and the accused. It is the concern of the legal system to determine the severity of the offense, not the general public.

The Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network (RAINN) provides resources on appropriate ways to respond to sexual assault, for instance their “TALK” framework specifically advises against minimizing the victim’s experiences, pressing them for details, or challenging their experience (“Are you sure that counts as assault?” is an example given in their resources).<sup>24</sup> RAINN also offers the following advice:<sup>25</sup>

*It can be extremely difficult for survivors to come forward and share their story. They may feel ashamed, concerned that they won’t be believed, or worried they’ll be blamed. Leave any “why” questions or investigations to the experts—your job is to support this person. Be careful not to interpret calmness as a sign that the event did not occur—everyone responds to traumatic events differently. The best thing you can do is to believe them.*

We re-iterate the earlier position that Stallman’s rhetoric [causes material harm](#) to victims of sexual assault, and we have illustrated that his political program contributes to an environment where the harm suffered by sexual assault victims is exacerbated by creating an atmosphere of confusion and doubt in which sexual violence can thrive.

On the subject of sexual assault, Stallman advances a political agenda which systematically undermines the importance of consent in sexual and intimate interactions, objectifying women as subjects of men’s desires, enabling men to force their sexual desires on women, and dismissing women’s agency in choosing how to express intimacy and interact with others.

## Dismissal of legal norms regarding sexual harassment

We have catalogued 13 primary sources in which Stallman misrepresents or downplays sexual harassment between 2014 and 2018 as part of a broader political program that aims to erode social and legal norms around sexual harassment.

### [Appendix: Stallman on sexual harassment](#)

Stallman's "anti-glossary" indirectly defines sexual harassment in its definition of sexual assault:<sup>8</sup>

*The term [sexual assault] is further stretched to include sexual harassment, which does not refer to a single act, but rather to a series of acts that amounts to a form of gender bias. Gender bias is rightly prohibited in certain situations for the sake of equal opportunity, but that is a different issue.*

We also note the following quote from November 2017:

*The term "sexual assault" is not suitable for a serious discussion, because it covers crimes of varying severities which call for different responses, plus sexual harassment which is not a crime.*

– [stallman.org, 3 November 2017 "Saboteur of Energy"](#)

Both of these examples are gross misrepresentations of sexual harassment. The US Equal Employment Opportunity Commission provides a more appropriate explanation:

*It is unlawful to harass a person (an applicant or employee) because of that person's sex. Harassment can include "sexual harassment" or unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical harassment of a sexual nature.*

*Harassment does not have to be of a sexual nature, however, and can include offensive remarks about a person's sex. For example, it is illegal to harass a woman by making offensive comments about women in general.*

*Both victim and the harasser can be either a woman or a man, and the victim and harasser can be the same sex.<sup>26</sup>*

Stallman's remarks on sexual harassment are antifactual. Sexual harassment is a crime, and it is not reducible to a kind of gender bias. It may consist of several actions forming a pattern of behavior, but isolated events of sufficient severity may also constitute sexual harassment.

We also note that the definition given in Stallman's anti-glossary changed sometime between February and March 2019. Previously it read as follows:

*[Acts that constitute sexual assault] are not merely different in degree. They are different in kind. Rape is a grave crime. Being groped is unpleasant but not as grave as robbery. Sexual harassment is a not an action at all, but rather a pattern of actions that constitutes economic unfairness. How can it make sense to group these behaviors things together?*

– [stallman.org, "Anti-glossary", archived February 2019 by archive.org](#)

Our report finds this change noteworthy on the basis that Stallman completed a mandatory course on sexual harassment in his role at MIT in September 2018, five months prior to the edit:

*In September MIT demanded that I take an online course about sexual harassment; although I don't teach classes or even meet undergraduates, they treated me like a professor on the "be overcautious at every*

*opportunity” principle. But I was unable to do so until MIT arranged to let me log in on an MIT kiosk terminal and bypassed the two-factor requirement for me.*

– [stallman.org](https://stallman.org), 7 May 2019 “[Mobile phone numbers for Facebook](#)”

The editors of this report sought to ascertain the nature of the training that Stallman received. The 2018 Annual Report from MIT’s Committee on Sexual Misconduct Prevention and Response<sup>27</sup> states that MIT faculty and staff members were required to complete the *Haven for Faculty and Staff* course provided by [Everfi](#), a US training provider which is relied upon by many educational institutions for training its faculty members. The editors reached out to the MIT committee and to Everfi for comment regarding the curriculum and did not receive a response. However, MIT’s annual reports provide some insight into the training material. The committee’s inaugural report in 2016 describes this program as follows:

*Haven’s introduction is completely customizable, including a welcome video (e.g., from the President, Provost, or Chancellor), a list of campus resources and contact information, and any other desired materials. The program continues with videos on supporting survivors, encouraging bystander intervention, and recognizing the potential for violence on campus or in the workplace, and then provides details on Title IX and other legislation. Four additional videos follow: “A Student Disclosure” about how to respond when a student or employee initiates a discussion about sexual misconduct; “Always Around” on policies and responses to stalking; “A Concerned Co-worker” about intimate partner violence that affects the workplace; and “Unwanted Attention” about addressing inappropriate behavior from a supervisor. Questions are posed before and after each video; incorrect answers trigger a gentle steering toward the most appropriate response.*<sup>28</sup>

The 2018 report also provides insights into the curriculum:

*All faculty and staff were required to complete Haven for Faculty and Staff, an online education program that includes examples and scenarios that faculty and staff may face around sexual assault, domestic violence, stalking, and sexual harassment.*<sup>27</sup>

The committee also summarizes the outcomes of the training program in their 2019 report, which provides a few examples of specific goals associated with the training program.<sup>29</sup> In particular, this report draws attention to the survey results enumerated in Appendix C, which indicate that the program’s goals were in part to obtain favorable responses to the following questions of note:

- I have a good understanding of what constitutes sexual assault, relationship violence, stalking, and sexual harassment.
- I am aware of strategies for preventing sexual assault, relationship violence, stalking, and sexual harassment.
- I am confident in my ability to respond to disclosures of sexual assault, relationship violence, stalking, and sexual harassment.
- A person should never be blamed for being the victim of sexual assault, abuse, or harassment.
- I think sexist jokes and language contribute to the issues of sexual assault, relationship violence, stalking, and sexual harassment.
- I plan to play an active role in addressing sexual assault, relationship violence, stalking, and sexual harassment at my institution.

From this we conclude that from September 2018 onwards, Stallman should have possessed a working understanding of sexual assault and sexual harassment, as well as the appropriate language and tone for discussing the matter, particularly with respect to the best interests of victims. Our sources note that Stallman’s website maintains misleading definitions of sexual assault and sexual harassment to the present day, and

we cite 15 examples of Stallman misrepresenting sexual assault following his 2018 training.

#### [Appendix: Stallman on sexual assault](#)

Our report notes that the sort of sexual harassment that Stallman consistently defends has long-term effects on the well-being of victims. Young women who are subjected to a man in a position of power “stealing a kiss” are objectified and reduced to a sexual object with no agency over consent in their interactions, an experience which prevents them from accessing education and employment opportunities on equal terms with respect to their male peers. Experiences of sexual harassment have long-term consequences for victims, including increased rates of symptoms of anxiety and depression for months following the incident, including in relatively “less grave” cases that Stallman defends such as sexual jokes or remarks and unwelcome advances. (Johansson et al, 2024)<sup>30</sup>

A 2019 study by Pinchevsky et al also characterizes the harmful effects of sexual harassment by distinguishing “non-contact” and “contact” harassment, where the former does not involve physical contact between the perpetrator and the victim.

*McGinley et al. (2016) found that experiences of non-contact SH [Sexual Harassment] undermined the health of college students. Non-contact SH is associated with decreased mental health (i.e., depression, anxiety) and increased health-risk behavior such as substance use as a coping mechanism, particularly among White females and sexual minorities (McGinley et al. 2016). Paludi et al. (2006) identified other research that noted the consequences of non-contact SH including changes in physical and mental health. Additionally, victims of non-contact SH are more likely to experience future SH (Petersen and Hyde 2009).*<sup>31</sup>

### **Support for the possession of child sexual abuse material**

We have catalogued 55 primary sources in which Stallman advocates for the possession and/or distribution of child sexual abuse material (aka “child pornography”) between 2003 and 2019, none of which are addressed by [Stallman’s 2019 retraction](#) on sexual relationships between adults and minors under the age of 12 or 13.

#### [Appendix: Stallman on child sexual abuse material](#)

The following quote from Stallman in June 2017 is a typical example:

*In the US, people convicted for having copies of child pornography tend to get longer prison sentences than those convicted of having sex with children.*

*Mere possession of child pornography should not be a crime at all. To prosecute people for possessing something published, no matter what it may be, is a big threat to human rights.*

– [stallman.org, 5 June 2017 “Possession of child porn”](#)

Stallman’s discourse on child sexual abuse material (CSAM) rely on several recurring key points:

1. A blanket objection to censorship in any form
2. Objections to legal norms regarding CSAM on the basis that CSAM depicting minors over the age of 12-13 do not depict an objectionable act, as adults having sex with minors in this age range is not a form of abuse ([rebuttal](#))
3. The assertion that minors distributing explicit images with similar-aged peers should not be prosecuted, often paired with a defense of adults who distribute images produced in this manner

We will first address Stallman’s political positions on CSAM which the editors do not find



unreasonable. First, Stallman often expresses concern that law enforcement tools and technologies developed to curtail the production and distribution of CSAM will be applied more generally and infringe on legitimate freedoms; the editors find this concern reasonable but disagree with Stallman's conclusion that CSAM possession and/or distribution should be legalized on this premise.

Stallman also defends the practice of "sexting", or exchange of sexually explicit material, between consenting minors of similar age; the editors find this argumentation reasonable. However, we object to Stallman's use of this argument as the basis for a more general argument in favor of the legalization of CSAM possession and distribution.

Stallman has also defended "sexting" cases which involve the sexual exploitation of a minor by an adult. In 2016, Stallman writes the following in response to the case of a 21 year-old man soliciting a 16 year-old girl for explicit images:

*A Pennsylvania man has been imprisoned for receiving nude photos from his 16-year-old girlfriend, and will have to register as a sex offender, but "only" for 15 years.*

*The willfully blind law pretends there is no difference between a teenager and a child.*

– [stallman.org](http://stallman.org), 30 August 2016 "Man imprisoned for receiving nude photos"

We now present a general rebuttal of Stallman's position on CSAM. Our report indicates four groups of people who experience material harm as a consequence of CSAM distribution:

- Victims of child sexual abuse
- Consumers of child sexual assault material
- Criminal investigators exposed to CSAM in their work
- Online content moderators tasked with CSAM removal

The possession and distribution of CSAM exacerbates the harm done to victims of sexual abuse. Experts on sexual violence assert that the distribution of CSAM causes children to be victimized twice: first by the perpetrator of their abuse, and again by the person who view it.<sup>32</sup> Jennifer Martin explains how CSAM impacts survivors of abuse:

*This persistent shame means that traumatic stress symptoms may continue indefinitely in cases of [child sexual abuse material]. Children's ongoing efforts to make meaning of their abuse experience may be ineffective, and they may continually fear what parents, caregivers, and others may think if they discover, or are shown, images of the abuse (Palmer, 2006). Victims may be further subjected to shame by the knowledge that images of the abuse are stored in law enforcement databases and may be accessed and shared indefinitely among and between legal agencies globally (Muir, 2005). They are powerless over the distribution or accessibility of the images of abuse, and must contend with the fact that they may be gazed upon by anyone at any time because their abuse images are "out there" in the public arena of cyberspace and can be forever shared and downloaded. The child may internalize the shame and humiliation of the "global gaze" thereby adding to the child's traumatic burden. The never-ending threat of this gaze can influence – have power over - how the child thinks, feels, and behaves. Ainley(1998) referred to the "constant torture of the random but ever possible gaze".<sup>33</sup>*

Consumers of CSAM also experience harm. According to Kothari et al, consumers of CSAM are at a high risk of suicide and experience symptoms associated with post-traumatic stress disorder and adjustment disorder. Offenders experience extreme feelings of stress, shame, and self-hatred, which impacts their ability to seek help (Kothari et al 2021).<sup>34</sup>

We also draw attention to the experiences of the online content moderators and criminal investigators who are tasked with combating the distribution of CSAM. Members of law enforcement who are exposed to CSAM in their work experience experience an elevated risk of sexual post-traumatic stress symptoms (sexual PTSS) (Gewirtz-Meydan et al, 2023).<sup>35</sup> Online content moderators are susceptible to similar risks, and often experience symptoms associated with post-traumatic and secondary traumatic stress (Spence et al, 2021).<sup>36</sup>

This report also draws attention to a particularly disturbing source from Richard Stallman's website, entitled "Suggestion to the target of a witch hunt", dated February 2015.<sup>37</sup> This article is listed on the front page of Stallman's website in a section on political articles outside of the scope of Stallman's free software political program. In this article, Stallman reveals that someone had emailed him asking for advice because they were "drawn to look at images of sex with children". Stallman published his response as follows:

*I don't think it is wrong to distribute "child porn" images, even when they [depict] children rather than adolescents. However, making them is wrong if it involves real sex with a child. For the sake of opposing sexual abuse of real children, I suggest that you boycott the images that involve real children. Imaginary children can't be hurt by drawing them.*

*I can't suggest any way you could talk publicly about your predilection without being the object of a witch hunt. Americans go nuts where they imagine that children are in danger, and in their frenzy they exaggerate tiny risks — look at how they jail parents for letting children go to the park or stay home without an escort.*

*To be sure, a child faces the danger of sexual abuse mainly while at home. But not while home alone with no members or friends of the family present.*

Stallman updated the page in 2016 with an additional note:

*2016 note: I support prosecution of those that perpetrate real abuse (sexual or not) of real children. By "real" I mean specifically that I do not follow states' definitions of these terms. In fact, some states stretch the terms to the point of absurd injustice. There is a tendency to define adolescents as "children" and define all sex involving adolescents as "sexual abuse". Infantilizing adolescents is harmful to society in many ways.*

*Since this is an ethical question, not a legal one, the question of the right definitions is for us to consider, not for states to dictate.*

The editors were particularly alarmed by this page. The person who reached out to Stallman for advice is subject to all of the harm faced by consumers of CSAM as discussed earlier in our report, and faces the risk of arrest and criminal prosecution if caught. Rather than providing this person with resources to seek help, Stallman states that there is nothing wrong with his behavior and uses the opportunity to publicly re-enforce his political program regarding CSAM and the sexual abuse of minors.

The editors cite this as an example of direct harm caused by Stallman and as evidence that Stallman's remarks are taken seriously, that he is viewed as an authority on sexual matters by some of those who read his work, and that he has been consulted for his opinion on these matters by his readers.

## **Legal and social normalization of sex between humans and animals**

We have catalogued 12 primary sources from 2003-2018 in which Stallman advocates for humans having sex with animals (bestiality) or the possession and distribution of pornography featuring humans having sex with animals. None of Stallman's remarks on bestiality have been retracted.

## [Appendix: Stallman on bestiality](#)

Stallman remarked most recently on the subject of pornography featuring humans and animals in 2018:

*Prudish censorship attacks again in the UK, convicting someone for possessing "extreme pornography", including images of sex with animals.*

*I can't imagine a possible reason to punish people for this. The article does not report that the animals were harmed, or that they objected to the experience, or that they thought of it as sexual. The law does not consider these questions pertinent.*

*What is, however, clear is that prohibiting the possession of copies of some image or text — no matter what that image or text may be — threatens human rights. It creates excuses to search through people's possessions and files. It creates ways to make people vulnerable to criminal charges without their cooperation or even their knowledge. All such laws must be repealed.*

– [stallman.org, 14 December 2018 "'Extreme pornography' conviction"](#)

The editors note that Stallman's remarks here are consistent with [his rhetoric on child sexual abuse material](#). In addition to arguing for the legal normalization of this kind of pornographic images, Stallman has explicitly supported the act depicted therein, for instance in 2017:

*European countries are passing laws against having sex with an animal. (We are talking about sex practices that don't physically hurt the animal.)*

*These laws have no rational basis. We know that some animals enjoy sex with humans. Others don't. But really, if you smear something on your genitals that tastes good to dogs, and have a dog lick you off, it harms no one. Why should this be illegal except mindless religion?*

– [stallman.org, 10 October 2017 "Laws against having sex with an animal"](#)

Stallman explained his views in more detail in 2016:

*A national campaign seeks to make all US states prohibit sex between humans and nonhuman animals.*

*This campaign seems to be sheer bull-headed prudery, using the perverse assumption that sex between a human and an animal hurts the animal. That's true for some ways of having sex, and false for others.*

*For instance, I've heard that some women get dogs to lick them off. That doesn't hurt the dog at all. Why should it be prohibited?*

*When male dolphins have sex with people, that doesn't hurt the dolphins. Quite the contrary, they like it very much. Why should it be prohibited?*

*I've also read that female gorillas sometimes express desire for sex with men. If they both like it, who is harmed? Why should this be prohibited?*

*The proponents of this law claim that any kind of sex between humans and other species implies that the human is a "predator" that we need to lock up. That's clearly false, for the cases listed above. Making a prohibition based on prejudice, writing it in an overbroad way, is what prissy governments tend to do where sex is concerned. The next step is to interpret it too strongly with "zero tolerance".*

*Will people convicted of having dogs lick them off be required to live at least 1000 feet from any dogs?*

*This law should be changed to prohibit only acts in which the animal is physically forced to have sex, or physically injured.*

– [stallman.org, 14 December 2016 “Campaign of bull-headed prudery”](#)

It is straightforwardly understood that animals cannot express consent; they are not capable of meaningfully communicating “yes” or “no” and they cannot explain their subjective experiences or advocate for themselves following sexual abuse. It is also understood that animal victims of sexual abuse experience symptoms similar to human victims; animal victims of sexual abuse commonly display signs of depression, anxiety, and aggression (Kunz 2019).<sup>38</sup>

The actors involved in pornographic films depicting bestiality are often coerced and humiliated by the act. Linda Lovelace is a famous pornographic actress who became widely known for her appearance in the 1972 film “Deep Throat”, later stating that she was coerced and raped on screen in this film. In 1969, she appeared in a film where she was coerced into performing sexual acts with a dog. She was forced to perform these acts at gunpoint and later explained the lasting effect of this experience:

*I am able to handle almost everything that has happened to me in my life... but I’m still not able to handle that day. A dog. An animal. I’ve been raped by men who were no better than animals, but this was an actual animal and that represented a huge dividing line. (...)*

*There were no greater humiliations left for me. The memory of that day and that dog does not fade the way other memories do. The overwhelming sadness that I felt on that day is with me at this moment, stronger than ever. It was a bad day, such a bad day.*<sup>39</sup>

Stallman’s remarks on bestiality are consistent with his broader dismissal of the importance of consent with respect to sexual interactions, be they animals, minors, subordinates, women whose consent is contingent on the use of contraception, or women who have previously consented to sex; in all of these cases Stallman absolves the perpetrator of wrongdoing and argues that images of these acts of sexual violence should not be subject to censorship.

## **Legal and social normalization of necrophilia**

We have catalogued 3 primary sources from 2003-2013 in which Stallman advocates for humans having sex with corpses (necrophilia) or the possession and distribution of pornography featuring humans having sex with corpses. We have also identified several more contemporary sources where Stallman remarks on the abuse of corpses generally in a non-sexual context, using the same argumentation used to advocate for necrophilia, as recently as 2023. None of Stallman’s remarks on the abuse of corpses, for sexual purposes or otherwise, have been retracted.

### [Appendix: Stallman on necrophilia](#)

For example, Stallman writes the following in April 2008 in a statement calling for pornography featuring living individuals having sex with corpses to be legalized:

*It is true that victims of real violence suffer. (Never mind that in making movies of violence, typically nobody is actually hurt.) The true oppressive spirit of this law starts to show in the prohibition of images of sex with corpses. Are we supposed to believe that corpses can suffer? Or are some cruel prudes trying to impose their prejudices by force?*

– [30 April 2008 \(Possession of “extreme pornography”\)](#)

The editors acknowledge that Stallman has not made any explicit statements in support of necrophilia since 2010. However, Stallman has often used the same line of argumentation in statements on the abuse of corpses more generally than for the purpose of sexual gratification since 2010. For example, in December 2023:

*Brittany Watts, of Ohio, had a miscarriage at home and disposed of the nonviable fetus as people often do. Now she faces possible charges of "abuse of a corpse".*

*The very idea of sentencing someone to prison for "abuse of a corpse" is absurd, since whatever is done to a corpse can't injure any person.*

– [stallman.org](https://stallman.org), 28 December 2023 "Brittany Watts"

Legal and social norms regarding the treatment of corpses acknowledge the agency of the deceased individual and their right to self-determination and bodily autonomy following their death. Moreover, the editors point out that a corpse is unable to express consent.

The treatment of a corpse is also a matter of respect for friends and family of the deceased, who should be allowed to grieve in peace without the knowledge that their loved one's corpse is being exploited for sexual gratification. The editors of this report cannot imagine a more traumatic grieving process than one which contends with the knowledge that images of the desecration of your loved one's corpse are being distributed for the sexual gratification of others.

It is noted that the rape of corpses is a war crime which has been reported in several conflicts and has been employed for the purpose of subjecting the population to terror, humiliation, and trauma.<sup>40</sup>

## Credible allegations of sexual misconduct

There are numerous allegations of misconduct regarding Richard Stallman. Most of these are hearsay recounts of individual experiences with Stallman. This report only includes allegations which have been corroborated or are otherwise considered verifiable.

### Testimony of Betsy S.

The testimony of "Betsy S." recalls the following interaction with Richard Stallman, which would have taken place in the early 1980's.

*When I was a teen freshman, I went to a buffet lunch at an Indian restaurant in Central Square with a graduate student friend and others from the AI lab. I don't know if he and I were the last two left, but at a table with only the two of us, Richard Stallman told me of his misery and that he'd kill himself if I didn't go out with him.*

*I felt bad for him and also uncomfortable and manipulated. I did not like being put in that position — suddenly responsible for an "important" man. What had I done to get into this situation? I decided I could not be responsible for his living or dying, and would have to accept him killing himself. I declined further contact.*

*He was not a man of his word or he'd be long dead.*

We consider the report verifiable on the basis that Stallman has corroborated Betsy's recollection of events in a July 2020 statement on the subject:

*A note to Betsy S.*

*Betsy S met me at a lunch around 40 years ago. I am sure her recounting of her recollections is sincere, but she must have misunderstood the last thing I said to her. She said she didn't want an acquaintance with me. That no, on top of so many noes from others, impelled me to express despair; she seems to have misconstrued that as a demand.*

*Betsy S, I regret that this misunderstanding caused you distress. I never intended to demand anything of you. I only ever wished you well.*

– [stallman.org](https://stallman.org), 19 July 2020 “A note to Betsy S.”

Betsy’s testimony describes an experience of sexual coercion, wherein Stallman threatens violence (to himself) if Betsy does not date him.

At the time of this incident, Betsy would have been a freshman at MIT, no older than 19, and Stallman would have been approximately 27 years old, a graduate student having been established at the AI lab for about nine years at this time. Stallman exploited this power differential in an attempt to take advantage of this young woman, coercing her into dating him.

Stallman’s 2020 response is lacking in several respects. The editors point out that at the time this response was written, Stallman should have been equipped with the requisite training to understand the gravity of this incident given his September 2019 course on sexual harassment and sexual violence at MIT, which is discussed in detail [earlier in this report](#).

We also draw attention to the phrasing of Stallman’s apology. Stallman blames Betsy for misunderstanding his intent when he threatened suicide if Betsy did not agree to date him. Stallman also excuses his behavior by shifting responsibility to Betsy and to women collectively, citing both that Betsy did not want an acquaintance with Stallman and that his actions were motivated by a series of romantic rejections. Stallman does not demonstrate an understanding of why his behavior was wrong, and does not take responsibility for his behavior; instead he “apologises” for Betsy’s behavior (i.e. misunderstanding him).

## “Emacs virgin” incidents

Richard Stallman has often performed a satirical routine as “St. IGNUcius” of the “Church of EMACS” at numerous events. The routine includes a ceremony regarding the “EMACS virgin” (a person who has not used EMACS before) with sexualized overtones. Prior to a 2009, Stallman emphasized in his routine that the virgin must be female, after 2009 Stallman referred to the EMACS virgin as a “person” who has not used EMACS.

We have several uncorroborated testimonies of women, including minors, being overtly sexualized during this routine, some without consent. In the course of our research we discovered that one of these routines was recorded, in which Stallman brings a 13 year-old girl on stage and makes sexually suggestive remarks about her in front of a crowd at FKFT 2008 in Barcelona.



We highlight the following quote from the transcript of this event:

*I saw her experiment once. She actually typed Ctrl+V to scroll the screen. But I think that– at that point that’s like having kissed, so she’s still a virgin for now. [Stallman approaches the girl and places a hand on her shoulder.] But I hope to do something about that. And, by the way, that reminds me that one of the other advantages of the Church of EMACS is that being a saint in this church does not require celibacy.*

Following a particularly controversial performance of this routine at the 2009 Gran Canaria Desktop Summit, Stallman made the following statement:



*Some of the people in the audience in my speech in the Gran Canaria Desktop Summit thought that my joke about the Virgin of Emacs was intended to make some kind of statement about women.*

*I was surprised by that reaction, since I had told the same joke dozens of times and this is the first report of interpreting it that way. In any case, it was a misunderstanding: the only intended meaning of the Cult of the Virgin of Emacs is to parody another Cult of the Virgin. The whole St IGNUius routine makes fun of me, the free software movement and religion, through parody.*

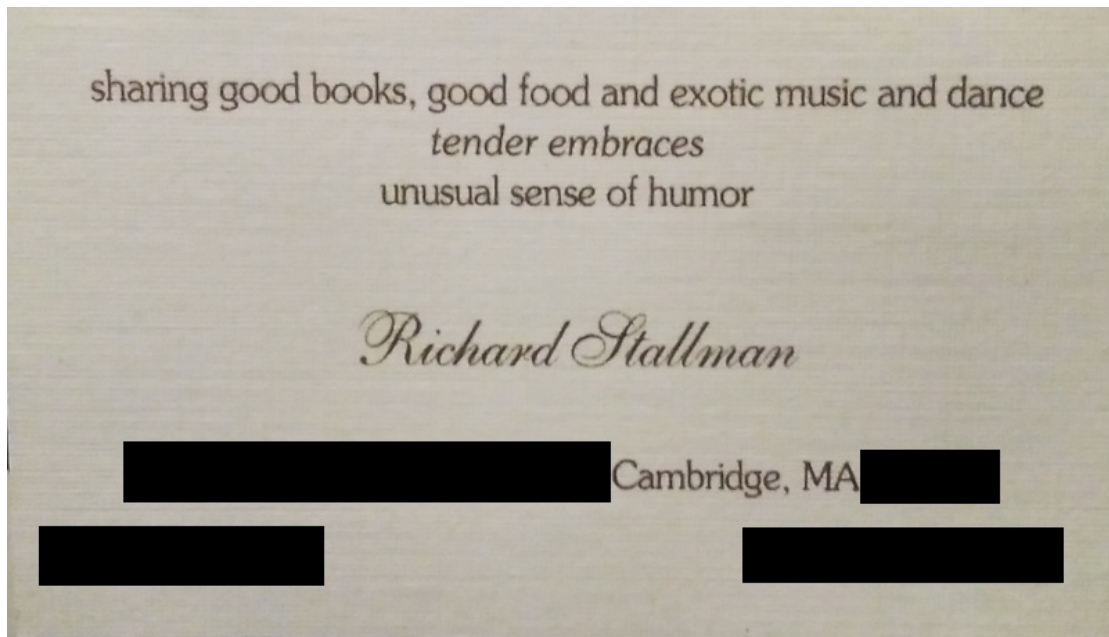
*To be abundantly clear, my views about women in connection with free software are simply that they deserve freedom in using computers, just as men do. Some women already appreciate this freedom and have become free software activists. We need more people, regardless of sex, to do this, so that someday all women, and all men, will enjoy the freedom that free software offers.*

*Misunderstanding is not a good outcome. To help avoid misunderstandings of this kind in the future, since August I have changed the joke so that the Virgin of Emacs can be of either sex.<sup>41</sup>*

Stallman has also [issued a statement on stallman.org](http://stallman.org) about the routine.

## **Pleasure cards**

In lieu of a traditional business card, it has been reported that Richard Stallman employs a "pleasure card", which solicits "tender embraces" from the recipient.



It has been suggested that Stallman gives these cards to people regardless of gender, but that when Stallman hands this card to women he often does so to supplement a romantic or sexual proposition. The editors reached out to a woman who received a "pleasure card" from Stallman for an interview, who we will refer to as Ms. W. The editors have independently corroborated Ms. W's testimony.

*I was at one of my first events as a speaker, at the speaker's dinner. Stallman was there and he approached me to chat. He spent a few minutes talking about himself, showing no interest in me or what I was working on. He didn't ask about my work, or my situation, he just wanted to... pick me up. I got the impression that he just assumed that he was entitled to my attention based on his fame and reputation.*

*He hit on me for a few minutes and handed me his "pleasure card", then*

told me he would be around later that evening – I just thought, "yeah, and I'll be hanging out with my spouse and kid". He moved to touch my arm, and I backed off and avoided him for the rest of the event.

It didn't even feel like he was particularly attracted to me – it felt like I was just a woman under 40 and that was enough.

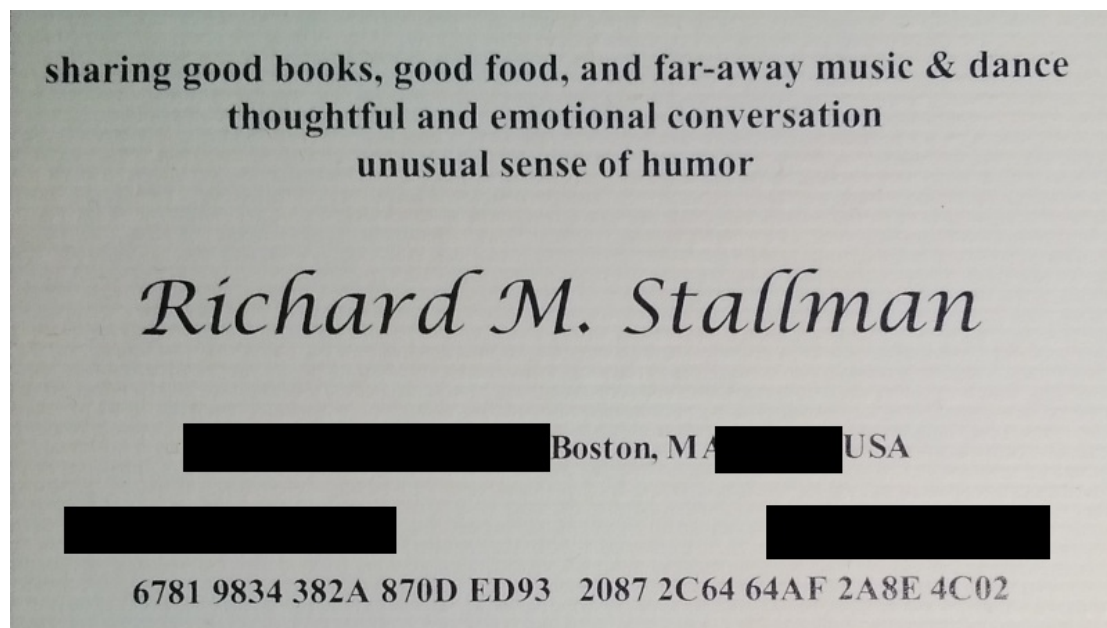
The editors note that the event in question had an anti-harassment policy. Ms. W elaborated on her thoughts after the fact:

I mean, I'm middle aged, I brought my kid – this wasn't my first rodeo. And it just felt so inappropriate in a professional context. If I had met Stallman in another context and we weren't "coworkers", in a way, it would have been... unwanted, but not inappropriate. There's a difference between, like, some of us clicked and went out for drinks and it was flirty, and this taking place at the speaker's dinner. And what made it so inappropriate was the power differential, of handing this to a relatively unknown woman when you're Richard Stallman and you're giving the keynote.

I've been hit on at events before – but it often felt like a peer-to-peer sort of thing, whereas the proposition from Stallman was more... "do you want to be an acolyte?" There was some kind of power dynamic at play. He was 20, 25 years older than me – it was like your dad was hitting on you. It didn't feel like he was my peer, and we hadn't talked enough to register if I was actually interested in him at all.

Ms. W notes that she attended a second event with Richard Stallman a year later, where she indicates that Stallman participated in writing the code of conduct, then violated that code of conduct when performing his "[St. Ignutius](#)" routine, as well as at other occasions. Ms. W reported her concerns to the event organizers, her testimony corroborated by Matthew Garrett (member of the FSF board of directors at the time), and was met with disbelief. Ms. W explains that the organizers were aware of Stallman's reputation at the time, and they stated "He's one of those neckbeardy guys, but we think he'll behave himself. We talked about it."

The editors have found a photograph which is alleged to be Stallman's new business card circa 2023, with the reference to "tender embraces" removed:



### Testimonies of former FSF staff

Georgia Young was the Program Manager for the FSF between 2015 and 2018 and testified to Stallman's conduct and character on Twitter in March 2021.

I worked at the FSF from 2015-2018 & was shop steward for a while. I

recall having a months-long conversation with [Executive Director] John Sullivan about why racist & sexist 'hacker humor' from the 90s needed to be removed from gnu.org. RMS didn't get why it was harmful.

The abortion joke<sup>42</sup> ('contributed' by RMS) in a technical manual? He threw a fit when it was removed. (...)

The thing that (people) who have never had to actually work with RMS don't understand is that MANY people who deeply respected him tried to help him learn to not objectify women, shout over others at Libreplanet as if it was his birthday party, (and) stop shit like 'emacs virgins'.

– [@georgialyle on Twitter, 24 March 2021](#)

Paul Fisher worked for 3 years on the staff of the Free Software Foundation and worked as a volunteer for 6 years, ceasing his involvement in 2004. Paul testified to his experiences on Twitter in March 2021:

*I worked at the FSF for 3 years and volunteered for over 6 years — that ended in 2004. I witnessed misogyny, sexual objectification, and abuse carried out by RMS. I banded together with my coworkers, formed a union, negotiated a contract, and was elected shop steward.*

*While RMS started the free software movement and the GNU GPL was a groundbreaking document, the community still has a right to hold him to account for his abhorrent actions and harmful speech. RMS should not be part of the FSF.*

– [@paulnivin on Twitter, 24 March 2021](#)

Paul also explained a few days later that the formation of the FSF staff union was motivated by Stallman's poor conduct.

*RMS created non-safe spaces at both MIT & the FSF. When I was at the FSF, RMS had little to no empathy for the staff. The FSF was not a healthy, functional workplace. We formed a union to help protect ourselves from RMS — he controlled our pay, benefits, and workplace conditions.*

*Everything was controlled by RMS — not the executive director, and not the board. The union helped turn FSF employment into what most people think of as a "normal" office job. It didn't fix everything. Some of the issues that we did fix:*

*RMS did not believe in providing raises — prior cost of living adjustments were a battle and not annual. RMS believed that if a precedent was created for increasing wages, the logical conclusion would be that employees would be paid infinity dollars and the FSF would go bankrupt.*

*RMS did not believe in providing bereavement leave. What if all your close friends and family die one after another? It's conceivable you would be gone from the office for days, or weeks, if not months. What if you lie about who is dying?*

*RMS would often throw tantrums and threaten to fire employees for perceived infractions. FSF staff had to show up to work each day, not knowing if RMS had eliminated their position the night before.*

*Respectively, the union provided a formula for allocating a portion of any budget surplus to COLAs and wage increases, bereavement leave, and progressive discipline for workers, ensuring that union employees could not be fired at RMS' whim.*

*RMS has not apologized for the harm he's caused. Both MIT & the FSF successfully separated themselves from RMS in 2019. Why did the secret*

| *group of voting FSF members reelect him to the board? Why.*

– [@paulnivin on Twitter, 31 March 2021](#)

The allegation that the FSF staff union was formed due to Stallman’s conduct is corroborated by David Turner, founder of the FSF’s GPL Compliance Labs:

| *Funny confluence of RMS and tech union tweets today. We unionized FSF, in large part, because RMS.*

– [@NovalisDMT on Twitter, 13 September 2019](#)

Matthew Garret, member of the FSF board of directors between 2014 and 2017 and winner of the FSF Award for the Advancement of Free Software wrote the following:

| *I know of at least one other case where Stallman has decided to protect an abuser. (...)*

| *Free software is an amazing thing, and [Richard Stallman] is a liability towards it.*

| *His refusal to take action and insistence on making excuses for an abuser is why I quit the FSF board. The FSF’s former general counsel threatened a board member at an FSF event. [Stallman] threatened to overrule staff if they attempted to enforce the event code of conduct and refused to tell the abuser’s employer.*

– [@mjb59 on Twitter, 13 September 2019](#)

## Misconduct of the FSF board of directors

This report alleges misconduct on the part of the 2019 FSF board of directors, and that the present-day board of directors is responsible both for enabling Richard Stallman and for failing to provide a workplace free of sexual harassment under federal and Massachusetts law.

The composition of the board in 2019, when the question of Stallman’s continued role in the FSF was under discussion, was as follows:<sup>43</sup>

- Alexandre Oliva
- Benjamin Mako Hill
- Bradley Kuhn
- Geoffrey Knauth
- Gerald Jay Sussman
- Henry Poole
- Kat Walsh
- Richard Stallman

This report has reason to believe that Bradley Kuhn, Kat Walsh, and Benjamin Mako Hill were not party to the misconduct of the 2019 board of directors. Mr. Kuhn’s public statements following his ejection from the board of directors have been a valuable source in the preparation of this report. Ms. Walsh voted against Stallman’s return to office and resigned from her position on the Board of Directors a few days following Stallman’s return.<sup>44</sup> Mr. Hill also publicly spoke against Stallman’s re-instatement and quit his positions at the FSF.<sup>45</sup>

Present-day members of the FSF Board of Directors are as follows:<sup>46</sup>

- Christina Haralanova
- Geoffrey Knauth
- Gerald Jay Sussman
- Henry Poole
- Ian Kelling

- John Gilmore
- Maria Chiara Pievatolo
- Richard M. Stallman

## Lack of transparency in governance

The Free Software Foundation, like most non-profits, maintains a Board of Directors which is responsible for directing its activities. The members of the Board of Directors are disclosed in the FSF's annual filings<sup>47</sup> and are clearly enumerated on the FSF's website.<sup>46</sup>

The governance of the FSF is also subject to a group of "Voting Members".<sup>48</sup> At the time of writing, this group is composed of the following members:

- Alexandre Oliva
- Christina Haralanoa
- Geoffrey Knauth
- Gerald Jay Sussman
- Henry Poole
- Ian Kelling
- John Gilmore
- Maria Chiara Pievatolo
- Odile Bénassy
- Richard M. Stallman

Information about the Voting Members on the FSF's website and has only been available since 2021, following Richard Stallman's return to the Board of Directors. According to the FSF, the primary function of the Voting Members is electing the Board of Directors.

According to public statements from the FSF, Richard Stallman resigned from all positions of governance on September 17th, 2019.<sup>49</sup> From this point until Stallman's return to the Board of Directors on April 12th, 2021, all public statements from the FSF supported the conclusion that Stallman was no longer involved in the governance of the Free Software Foundation.

However, the testimony of Bradley Kuhn alleges that Stallman never resigned as a Voting Member, and remained a Voting Member throughout the period of his resignation.<sup>50</sup>

This report alleges that the FSF has maintained, particularly between the events of 2019 and 2021, a "shadow government" which is subject to a lack of transparency in their role and operations, and alleges misconduct in misleading the public on the nature of Stallman's role in the FSF between 2019 and 2021.

## Knowledge of Stallman's misconduct

Bradley Kuhn was the Executive Director of the Free Software Foundation between 2001 and 2005, and served on the board of directors from March 2010 to October 2019.<sup>51</sup> Following [Mr. Kuhn's expulsion](#), he issued a public statement on the 2019 controversy<sup>50</sup> where he asserts that Stallman's behavior was well-known to the FSF for at least two years prior to the public outcry; other sources suggest it was known for longer:

*For the last two years, I had been a loud internal voice in the FSF leadership regarding RMS' Free-Software-unrelated public statements; I felt strongly that it was in the best interest of the FSF to actively seek to limit such statements, and that it was my duty to FSF to speak out about this within the organization. (...)*

*I attempted to argue with him at length to convince him that some of his positions were harmful to sexual assault survivors and those who are sex-trafficked, and to the people who devote their lives in service to such*



*individuals. More importantly to the FSF, I attempted to persuade RMS that launching a controversial campaign on sexual behavior and morality was counter to his and FSF's mission to advance software freedom, and told RMS that my duty as an FSF Director was to assure the best outcome for the FSF, which IMO didn't include having a leader who made such statements.*

## **Ejection of Bradley Kuhn**

In October 2019, Bradley Kuhn was removed from the Free Software Foundation Board of Directors and Voting Members. Mr. Kuhn's public remarks on the matter provide insight into the misconduct of the board during the scandal of 2019.<sup>50</sup> Quoting Mr. Kuhn:

*I was narrowly (by exactly one vote) voted out (of all my FSF roles) by FSF's Voting Members.*

*I was voted out for various reasons. The most relevant reason was a fundamental disagreement about the criteria and requirements for RMS' return to the FSF Board of Directors. In particular, during September-October 2019, I was insisting that one qualification for reinstatement was a complete, unqualified apology for RMS' September 2019 statements that (a) "she [Virginia Giuffre] presented herself to him [Marvin Minsky][sic] as entirely willing", and (b) Giuffre (who was sex-trafficked by Jeffrey Epstein) committed "an injustice" by accusing Minsky[sic] of sexual assault in her deposition.*

The FSF's "Voting Members" are responsible for electing the FSF Board of Directors. Mr. Kuhn reports that Richard Stallman was a Voting Member at this time.

We conclude from this testimony that Mr. Kuhn was ejected from the Free Software Foundation governance for the apparent purpose of facilitating Richard Stallman's eventual return to the Board of Directors, in particular that his return not be contingent on apologizing for his behavior, disenfranchising Mr. Kuhn of his legitimate vote on the matter of the membership of the Board of Directors, and demonstrates that the FSF was preparing for Stallman's re-instatement even as they were facilitating his resignation.

## **Failure to account for sexual harassment**

We assert that the Free Software Foundation's consistent protection for Richard Stallman despite prior knowledge of allegations of his misconduct signals incompetence with respect to their legal obligation to maintain a workplace free of sexual harassment. Allegations of misconduct while Stallman was conducting official FSF business are enumerated above, but did not appear to instigate an investigation by FSF leadership. We contend that an appropriate response to the allegations would have been to perform an investigation similar to one undertaken by the editors of this report, which would have presented a clear case for Stallman's removal.

We also argue that the FSF has created a "hostile work environment" under US and Massachusetts law. In one respect, we hold that retaining in leadership an individual who does not understand sexual harassment or sexual assault and continuously makes public statements to this effect constitutes a hostile work environment. We also argue that the 2019 expulsion of Bradley Kuhn constitutes illegal retaliation under Title VII of the United States Civil Rights Act of 1964.

Moreover, regardless of the conclusion of proceedings following the 2019 scandal involving Richard Stallman, we feel that the FSF leadership failed to implement prudent steps to address sexual harassment in its workplace at a moment when it would have been obvious to do so.

It is unknown to the authors of this report if the FSF is in full compliance with Massachusetts law regarding sexual harassment, in particular if they have prepared a



policy regarding sexual harassment, have established processes for reporting sexual harassment, or annually provide materials to this effect to all employees. However, we note that Massachusetts provides optional recommendations that the FSF does not appear to have implemented in the aftermath of the 2019 scandal:

*Employers and labor organizations are encouraged to conduct an education and training program for new employees and members, within one year of commencement of employment or membership, which includes at a minimum the information set forth in this section. Employers are encouraged to conduct additional training for new supervisory and managerial employees and members within one year of commencement of employment or membership, which shall include at a minimum the information set forth in subsection (b), the specific responsibilities of supervisory and managerial employees and the methods that such employees should take to ensure immediate and appropriate corrective action in addressing sexual harassment complaints. Employers, labor organizations and appropriate state agencies are encouraged to cooperate in making such training available.<sup>52</sup>*

We note that Richard Stallman received mandatory sexual harassment training at MIT in September 2018, which we discuss [earlier in the report](#). Everfi, the company responsible for the training program Stallman received, provides course materials which are compliant with California AB 1825 requirements on mandatory training.<sup>53</sup> These requirements include that training materials cover, among other things, identifying retaliatory behavior under federal law and an employer's obligation to complete an investigation upon receiving a report of sexual harassment. It is reasonable to assume that Stallman is familiar with these legal norms.

Gerald Sussman, also on the FSF Board of Directors during the 2019 scandal, was also a member of the MIT faculty during its 2018 mandatory training program and presumably received similar training.

## **2020 Form 990 IRS filing**

*The editors have retracted this section of the report following a tip from an insider who clarified the tax situation of the FSF.*

## **Regarding the FSF codes of ethics**

The report notes that the FSF has published two codes of ethics, respectively applying to the Board of Directors<sup>54</sup> and its Voting Members,<sup>55</sup> and respectively appearing in December 2021 and July 2022. As such, neither were in force at the time the above reported misconduct took place.

However, this report takes this opportunity to offer a retrospective analysis of FSF board members' and voting members' 2019 conduct with respect to these codes of ethics, as well as a contemporary analysis of their conduct.

On the subject of Mr. Kuhn's expulsion from the FSF governing bodies, we consider the following principle of the Voting Member's code of ethics:

*A Voting Member must act in good faith in accord with the regulations of the Free Software Foundation, including its articles of incorporation and its bylaws.*

We assert that the removal of Mr. Kuhn for the purpose of installing an electorate that would re-instate Richard Stallman on favorable terms is not acting in good faith and hold the quorum accountable to this.

It is noted by Mr. Kuhn that Richard Stallman was among the Voting Members that voted for Mr. Kuhn's expulsion. We find that this contravenes the following provision of the code of ethics for board members:

*Board members shall all avoid placing—and the appearance of placing—one’s own self interest or any third-party interest, including the interests of associate members, above that of the organization as a whole.*

We argue that the continued support of the Free Software Foundation Board of Directors for Richard Stallman’s platform places the interests of Richard Stallman above that of the organization as a whole, in particular with respect to the formal policy of non-cooperation many institutions in the free software community have adopted with respect to the FSF so long as Stallman remains on the board.

We also note that Richard Stallman’s prolonged political program in defense of sexual violence contravenes the following provision:

*Members of the FSF’s board of directors acknowledge that their statements and actions have greater potential to reflect broadly on the organization because of their leadership position and will take seriously their position of public visibility and trust.*

This report notes that the FSF defines no particular recourse for violations of its codes of ethics.

## **Response of the free software community**

Following the 2021 re-instatement of Richard Stallman to his position on the Free Software Foundation board of directors, numerous individuals and institutions in the free software community spoke out in protest. Our report focuses on institutions, on the basis that institutional policies of non-cooperation with the FSF over the role of Richard Stallman is a significant obstacle to the objectives of Free Software Foundation.

In 2021, 61 institutions and 3,003 individuals signed an open letter calling for Stallman to be removed from all leadership positions, and calling for the board of directors of the Free Software Foundation to resign.<sup>56</sup> An additional 33 GNU project maintainers and developers collectively called for Stallman’s removal in 2019.<sup>57</sup>

This report highlights the following institutions that have explicitly withdrawn financial support and/or adopted a policy of non-cooperation with the Free Software Foundation over concerns regarding Richard Stallman:

- [Free Software Foundation Europe](#)
- [Okta Bad Packets](#)
- [Outreachy](#)
- [Red Hat](#)
- [The Fedora Project](#)
- [The Open Source Initiative](#)
- [Tor Foundation](#)
- [openSUSE](#)

## **Recommendations for reconciliation and closure**

This report provides the following recommendations to parties involved for seeking reconciliation and closure for the problems enumerated herein.

### **Recommendations to Richard Stallman**

To Mr. Stallman, we offer the following advice:

1. We urge you to issue a detailed retraction of the positions enumerated in this publication and cease all future statements of this nature, and to demonstrate your renewed understanding of the subject matter.
2. We urge you to meaningfully apologize for the material harm you’ve done in the course of your political work to defend sexual violence and undermine the

experiences of victims of sexual violence.

3. We urge you to remove all political notes and articles cited by this report from your website, or update them with a link to your retraction.
4. We ask you to step down from all positions at the FSF and the GNU project and entrust it to a new generation of leaders.

We are of the unfortunate opinion that the scope and extent of your misconduct disqualifies you from formal positions of power within our community indefinitely. Your influence on the free software community is profound and immeasurable, as is the harm you have done to victims of sexual violence. If you wish to cement the positive parts of your legacy, you must contend with the consequences of your violent political program.

## **Recommendations to the FSF leadership**

We offer the following recommendations to the FSF Board of Directors and Voting Members.

1. To Voting Members, if Richard Stallman fails to step down of his own accord, we urge you to convene a meeting of voting members at the earliest possible occasion in accordance with section 7 of the FSF by-laws for the purpose of removing Richard Stallman from both the Voting Members and the Board of Directors.
2. If Richard Stallman fails to retract his political statements on sexual violence, we encourage you to release a statement denouncing them.
3. To all members of the present-day Voting Members and Board of Directors who were contemporaneous with the 2019 scandal and the associated patterns of misconduct, we urge you to step down from your posts and allow new leaders to fill your roles. Namely:
  - Alexandre Oliva
  - Geoffrey Knauth
  - Gerald Sussman
  - Henry Poole

In particular we call upon Mr. Knauth to uphold his 2021 pledge to resign “as soon as there is a clear path for new leadership assuring continuity of the FSF’s mission and compliance with fiduciary requirements”.<sup>58</sup>

4. The leadership is called upon to improve the FSF codes of ethics to prevent future errors of this sort, including the institution of reasonable measures of recourse in the event of violations of the codes of ethics.
5. The leadership is called upon to implement a comprehensive program of sexual harassment training within the Free Software Foundation, as well as policies and procedures for handling allegations of sexual harassment.
6. All parties complicit in the platforming of Richard Stallman are encouraged to consider publishing a written apology for their conduct.

We strongly urge you to take these actions in the best interests of the free software community and the future of the Free Software Foundation.

## **Recommendations to the GNU project**

To the leadership of the GNU project, we recommend the following steps:

1. The removal of Stallman as the “chief GNUisance” of the GNU project if he fails to step down of his own accord.
2. Replacing the transphobic [GNU Kind Communication Guidelines](#) authored by Stallman with a Code of Conduct which better addresses the needs and safety of the community.

## Recommendations to the free software community

If the leadership of the Free Software Foundation fails to account for these problems, we call upon the community to boycott the FSF. Consider cancelling your membership fees. We also encourage members of the community to voice their support for these calls to action, disseminate our report as broadly as possible, and raise our voices in condemnation of sexual violence and those who protect perpetrators of it.

## Acknowledgements

This report was prepared in collaboration with a number of researchers, advisors, and victims of sexual violence. The editors acknowledge that the process of researching the material for this report or testifying to experiences of sexual violence and harassment was traumatic for those involved, and we thank them for their bravery and cooperation.

## Contact us

The editors of this report may be reached by email to [editors@stallman-report.org](mailto:editors@stallman-report.org).

Our PGP public key is:

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5. There is one exception in our section on sexual harassment, where we cite an archived quote to demonstrate Stallman's change of opinion on the subject over time. ↵
6. Stallman uses "per" as a genderless third-person pronoun. [stallman.org, "Better Genderless Pronouns in English"](#) ↵
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20. The editors note that Maraj's victim was 11 years old at the time of her rape, and as such this comment may be covered by Stallman's 2019 retraction; it is indicated as such in the appendices. However, in this comment Stallman represents Maraj's victim as an "adolescent", which in [Stallman's idiolect](#) refers to minors above the age of 12 or 13, and it is from this basis that he presents his arguments. [↵ ↵](#)
21. National Center for Victims of Crime, 2012 archive, [About Sexual Assault](#) [↵](#)
22. Zahra Fatima 2024, '[Luis Rubiales to stand trial over World Cup kiss](#)', BBC [↵](#)
23. See [stallman.org](https://stallman.org), 28 September 2018 "Cody Wilson" [↵](#)
24. RAINN, '[How to Support a Loved One](#)' [↵](#)
25. RAINN, '[Tips for Talking with Survivors of Sexual Assault](#)' [↵](#)
26. U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, '[Sexual Harassment](#)' [↵](#)
27. MIT Committee on Sexual Misconduct Prevention and Response, May 25, 2018 [Annual Report](#) [↵ ↵](#)
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43. [fsf.org, Staff and Board, 2019 archive via the Internet Archive](#) [↵](#)
44. [Kat Walsh, March 23 2021](#) [↵](#)
45. [The Free Software Foundation and Richard Stallman](#) [↵](#)
46. [fsf.org, Staff and Board](#) [↵](#) [↵](#)
47. See [ProPublica – Free Software Foundation Inc](#) [↵](#)
48. [fsf.org, FSF board frequently asked questions](#) [↵](#)
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