

The following is an archived version of Monica Cellio's GoFundMe page in connection with Stack Overflow. It exists for archival purposes, in case the GoFundMe page is removed or altered. The aim of this archive is to preserve the content, not to provide functionality or retain the original appearance. Some links have been removed to avoid confusion.

The original of this page was

<https://www.gofundme.com/f/stop-stack-overflow-from-defaming-its-users>

This is based on a snapshot taken on December 22, 2019.

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## Defend Monica from Defamation by Stack Overflow

**\$25,294 raised of \$30,000 goal**

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Anonymous

- \$500
- 8 hrs



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Kevin Partington

- \$100
- 1 d

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Anonymous

- \$50
- 2 d

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  - \$50
  - 3 d
- fedorqui SE
  - \$10
  - 3 d

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Monica Cellio is organizing this fundraiser.

- Created October 28, 2019
- Volunteer & Service

For over seven years I've been a dedicated volunteer moderator on the Stack Exchange network of Q&A sites. (You might have heard of Stack Overflow, the flagship site.) I've helped to nurture and build sites on topics ranging from writing to Judaism to the professional workplace. I've received many compliments from users, fellow moderators, and SE employees. For most of that time, moderators enjoyed a good working relationship with the company that provides our platform. **Libel was the farthest thing from anyone's mind.**

**But the company changed**, and they started worrying more about pageviews than people, more about attracting new users than supporting their established contributors. As part of this effort, they planned a change to the Code of Conduct. **The intent behind the change was good**, but I and others had concerns about the details. I asked questions. I pushed back, respectfully.

**This was not unusual.** Other policy changes have been brought to the moderators and we've provided feedback, asked questions, suggested changes. But this time was different. This time there were bright red lines, but I didn't see them.

After I raised concerns and had a brief email exchange with a member of the team -- my last questions were never answered -- [I was suddenly removed as a moderator without warning](#) . That's upsetting but within Stack Exchange's rules; SE owns the platform, and they can remove a moderator for any reason or none at all. **But until now removals were rare, came after warnings, and had solid reasons.**

The email that I got indicated that I was being removed because they didn't think I would obey the forthcoming Code of Conduct -- never mind that it wasn't even finalized yet. This was a pre-emptive strike. I objected that I hadn't done anything, but got no response.

If they had stopped there, you wouldn't be reading this page on GoFundMe.

But instead of stopping there, and in violation of their longstanding privacy policies, company representatives announced that I had been fired. Not only that, but they **made [public posts](#)** accusing me of being opposed to inclusion and respect. Not only that, but they **accused me in the [press](#)**, branding me as a bigot and claiming I violated the **current** (not future) Code of Conduct. Community members and other moderators immediately objected, but instead of retracting the statements they then **[used their platform to make more accusations](#)** and make the accusations prominent on every single site on the network.

Some of their statements are merely hurtful and false, but they might be able to claim the statements are opinions. **However, they also made a serious, false, factual claim, which is legally defamation.**

Since September 27, the day they suddenly fired me, I have made many attempts to resolve the matter. They won't talk to me, won't answer my email or support tickets, and won't even show me the alleged CoC violations.

Meanwhile, the defamation is **causing me real harm**. It's damaged my reputation, affected my health, and attracted trolls that make me concerned for my safety. Way back when I joined, I followed the suggestion of Stack Overflow's founder and used my real name on the site. **Now the company is using that to harm me**. Even [a clear description of the many ways they have failed me](#) has fallen on deaf ears. I've exhausted all internal options to seek correction.

**And so I must turn to external options.** I don't want to have to litigate, but I see no other way to clear my name and reverse at least some of the harm that Stack Exchange has knowingly, willfully done to me.

**The fundraising goal will rise over time.** That is the nature of litigation. This amount covers the first round of costs. I still hold out hope that Stack Exchange will realize their errors and agree to settle with me. If they did not act with malice they should be willing to do that; it would be the decent thing to do, what we would expect of a company that still values respect. It's in everybody's best interest to resolve this quickly and inexpensively. But of course I can't control their actions, only my own.

The funds raised by this campaign will be spent to cover the costs of lawyers, filings, discovery, expert witnesses if needed, any needed travel to New York, and other associated expenses in pursuit of getting Stack Exchange to right the wrongs they have done me. I'll report on spending as we go. In the event that we raise more money than is needed to cover the cost of reaching a settlement or judgement, excess funds will be donated to [The Trevor Project](#), an organization that provides crisis-intervention services to LGBTQ+ youth and related resources to everyone. See the Nov 4 update for more information.

I'm Monica Cellio, a (former) moderator on six Stack Exchange sites including Meta, where I was [appointed](#) for an outstanding track record. My [network profile](#) shows my contributions across Stack Exchange.

## Updates (7)

- November 14, 2019 by Monica Cellio, Organizer

We are in the phase where things are happening but I can't talk publicly about them yet. There has been no further communication from SE to me, which isn't surprising -- my requests for information and dialogue have gone unanswered since the day they suddenly removed me.

The SE community has been busy raising awareness of my situation and this fundraiser (thanks!). I saw community-promotion ads on several sites; these are ads that the \*communities\* vote on, for anything the community wants to support. A lot of users have also added links and explanations in their user profiles, space that has historically been for anything the user wants to say that isn't blatantly offensive. For example, you can promote your outside projects, even things not related to the site's topic -- that's always been fine. I promote the Worldbuilding blog on my profile on all sites including technical ones, for example. And many users have changed their names to add things like "stop harming Monica" or "GoFundMonica" or "reinstate Monica" to their usernames.

Today SE began clamping down on these efforts. They removed all the community ads and announced that they'll remove links from profiles. (No word yet on usernames.) You can see the announcement and the community reaction here:

<https://meta.stackexchange.com/q/338270/162102>

- November 4, 2019 by Monica Cellio, Organizer

After reviewing several candidates and consulting with others who know this space better than I do, I've chosen The Trevor Project (<https://www.thetrevorproject.org/about/programs-services/>) for the charity fallback in case we raise more funds than we need for the legal action.

The Trevor Project provides support including crisis intervention to LGBTQ+ youth and a variety of related community resources for everyone. They have a 93.84% score on Charity Navigator including 100% for accountability (<https://www.charitynavigator.org/index.cfm?bay=search.summary&orgid=11281>), and while their phone-based crisis hotline seems to be limited to North America, they also offer online crisis services that are not geographically limited.

- November 1, 2019 by Monica Cellio, Organizer

Once I can share things publicly I'll set up some sort of public document or spreadsheet to share expenses as we go. I don't want to share information with Stack Exchange prematurely, so there will be delays in this. What I can share for now is that I've paid a \$7500 retainer and my lawyer is working on the initial complaint (and digging through a pile of evidence I've sent).

Meanwhile, I want to share a podcast I recently appeared on. Tyler's Tech, as the name suggests, mostly covers tech, including deep dives into operating systems and other software. Tyler contacted me after reading the article in The Register and I agreed to an interview. You can listen to it at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tFiQPkdb5Qs>

I was a bit nervous (public speaking is not my strong suit), but I'm pleased with the result.

Finally, I'll be going offline for Shabbat soon, so thank-you notes will be delayed. Please know that I appreciate all the support and I will individually respond when I am back online.

- October 31, 2019 by Monica Cellio, Organizer

I've just gotten off a call with my attorney, who is in the process of working through the large pile of evidence I assembled and preparing formal documents. I can't say a lot about that publicly yet, but things are moving along well.

The amount we've raised so far covers the \$7500 retainer I paid (thanks!). We know that there will be a lot more costs as the case proceeds, and on my attorney's advice I'm raising the goal to \$30k. I am gratified by the support you all have shown me, both in dollars and in words. We have a solid case, should SE continue to refuse to negotiate. Let's win this!

Edited to add: I want to be transparent in how the money is being spent. I need to figure out how to best do that.

- October 30, 2019 by Monica Cellio, Organizer

Wow, we've reached \$10k! And way faster than I thought we would! Thank you all for the overwhelming support!

I expect to have more information about further costs tomorrow, and will raise the goal accordingly then.

- October 30, 2019 by Monica Cellio, Organizer

Thank you again for this outpouring of support! I expect to have more information about costs on Thursday.

Meanwhile, I'd like to share something that Pekka, a high-reputation user on Stack Overflow (<https://stackoverflow.com/users/187606/pekka-supports-gofundmonica>), wrote yesterday:

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A popular and well-respected volunteer network moderator, Monica Cellio, was terminated without warning[1] and portrayed to the press as misgendering trans people[2] by Stack Overflow, Inc. All signs suggest this was an erroneous, if not malicious, decision not founded on fact, which the company is completely failing to take any responsibility for. This has caused an enormous and ongoing uproar in the community.[3]

Monica and the community have been quite literally begging for some kind of response from the company either opening up a path to reinstatement, or justifying their decision to terminate her, for more than a month now. She's made many good-faith offers to talk, and others have offered to mediate (and made dozens of constructive suggestions on how to resolve the situation).[4] Several members of the Lavender community have spoken up on her behalf, e.g.

in this prominent post.[5]

So far, Stack Overflow, Inc. has met all of this with thunderous silence. As a long-time contributor and someone always willing to see the good in the company's and its employees' actions and assume good faith, I'm still struggling to come to terms with the corporate callousness of this behaviour which we have to assume now is the new normal.

Having exhausted all other means of communication,[6] Monica is now raising funds for potential legal action to clear her name. This is in her own interest, but arguably also in the interest of the SO community at large. While only the libel is likely to be legally actionable, it might establish at least some boundaries to what the company can do to its volunteers, as well as be a symbolic slap in the face of a business that appears to have lost all respect for the community that keeps it alive.

I have complete trust the funds will be used well and anything left over (say because they decide to do the right thing after all and legal action becomes unnecessary) will go toward good causes.

Consider supporting her today.

[1] <https://judaism.meta.stackexchange.com/questions/5193>

[2] <https://meta.stackexchange.com/questions/334133>

[3] <https://meta.stackexchange.com/questions/333965>

[4] <https://meta.stackexchange.com/search?q=monica>

[5] <https://meta.stackexchange.com/questions/336731>

[6] <https://meta.stackexchange.com/questions/336526>

- October 29, 2019 by Monica Cellio, Organizer

Thank you everybody for your overwhelming support! I am stunned, humbled, and gratified.

The initial goal I set covers the first set of costs. In anticipation of more costs soon, I've raised the goal. If Stack Exchange does not respond favorably (or at all, which has been their pattern so far), costs will rise further as we proceed. I will update the goal as we go. I should have more information about next steps and their costs late this week.

Thank you again for your support, and for those of you who are Stack Exchange users, thank you for raising awareness and keeping up the pressure. I am boggled that the company is

unwilling to even come to the table to negotiate a mutually-beneficial settlement. This doesn't have to cost either of us vast amounts of money, aggravation, and distraction from other goals.

DonateShare

## Organizer

Monica Cellio

Organizer

Pittsburgh, PA

[Contact](#)

## Community Photos (2)

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## Comments (99)

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James Burcham donated **\$10**

Monica, I have written a very carefully considered response to David's question "What are the next steps we as a community should take." I fear it is too late to get many votes, but I feel it contains some important things. If you would consider...

- 4 d

- 

James Burcham donated **\$10**

In response to SE, Inc. removing links and references to your GoFundMe campaign, I have doubled my original contribution to your GoFundMe campaign.

- 5 d

- 

Jonathan Buhacoff donated **\$100**

Stack Overflow's Code of Conduct talks about being clear and constructive, being patient and welcoming, being inclusive and respectful. The employees of Stack Exchange Inc. failed at all those things in the way they treated Monica. I like using...

- 14 d

- 

Martin Tournioj donated **\$5**

Whatever your position on the alleged CoC violations (reasonable people can disagree about this), Monica is treated as a random anonymous internet troll instead of a dedicated good-faith volunteer with years of outstanding service. I find the lack...

- 15 d

-

Robert Burgh donated **\$50**

This is my second donation. I own a business and think it is completely foolish how SE is behaving. They are being irresponsible, poorly managed, and taking wasteful legal advice. It would be wrong to allow SE to go unchallenged in the matter...

- 15 d



Forrest Hopkins donated **\$15**

codidact.org

- 16 d



david reilly donated **\$25**

it is the right thing to do !

- 18 d



Reva Freedman donated **\$36**

I don't have a SO account, so this is my way of saying "Support Monica".

- 18 d



Paul Johnson donated **\$20**

I donated because Monica is an awesome person ... let's get her diamonds back where they belong.

- 19 d



Jeff Bowman donated **\$30**

SO's link removal is a bridge too far. It is awful how far the community has fallen in so short a time. Monica, I wish you well, and I'm sorry you've had to endure this. I sincerely hope SO apologies and this money can be used for better purposes,...

- 24 d

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