

To FZI board members and the community at large,

On December 15, 2025, I formally resigned from my positions as a board member and senior member of the First Zen Institute of America (FZI) after twelve years of volunteering and practice. I am writing now because, in the months since, the board has taken insufficient action. Since my resignation, and after submitting three letters documenting sexual misconduct by Michael Hotz, I have received exactly one correspondence from the FZI board, nine months later, sharing that they had finally updated the anti-harassment policy. To my knowledge, they did not disclose the reason for my resignation or the existence of the complaint letters for over seven months. The sangha was kept in the dark until the letters became public in late June. The letters I submitted are firsthand accounts of grooming and sexual misconduct by Hotz spanning 2017 to 2025, including testimony provided to the board as part of the materials gathered in connection with the request for his removal from the presidency and, more broadly, from FZI entirely. These accounts, from young women who came to FZI seeking spiritual guidance, describe what I can only characterize as a decades-long pattern: cultivating emotional dependence from vulnerable young women, sexualizing relationships with them, invoking Buddhist spiritual attainments, which the accounts describe as fabricated, to justify sexual contact, and exploiting the very grief, loneliness, and search for meaning that bring people to Buddhist practice.

What is unmistakable is a decades long pattern of a man using Buddhist practice to exploit and violate young women sexually. In one account, of which I was a direct witness, he initiated a sexual relationship with a twenty-three-year-old he had positioned as his spiritual student and explicitly used his Buddhist practice to take advantage of her sexually. In another account, I was made aware of after my resignation, a relationship began when a young woman was sixteen and Hotz was sixty-three; the account states that he sexualized that relationship as she grew older. He used Buddhist practice over a prolonged period to lay the groundwork to violate this young woman sexually. Whatever one calls these relationships, they were not peer relationships or affairs of poor judgment, they involved a pattern of stark abuse of spiritual authority and trust, by a man who was, by his own account, a spiritual elder. This misconduct did not emerge from nowhere, it grew in, was enabled and protected by a culture. For years, FZI's leadership operated as a "boys' club" with few women in attendance. As often the lone woman present, I found the atmosphere deeply uncomfortable. Hotz's jocular language went further: he referred to the young women around him collectively as his "dakinis" — taking a sacred figure from the Buddhist Vajrayana tradition and repurposing it as a label for the collection of young women in his orbit.

To me, this was not an honorific; it was objectification dressed in spiritual language, and it was treated as being charming, as being a joke, as simply how things were. When a community's speech turns women into objects and trophies, it should surprise no one when its leader is accused of treating them as such. Because of all of this, I felt obliged to watch over and screen new women who attended open houses, a precaution that speaks for itself about the environment FZI was maintaining. The pattern continues to the present: as recently as two years ago, I was told, unwanted advances toward a new attendee drove her to stop coming to

the weekly zazen. This continues a pattern documented earlier from one of the original complaints where I learned that a circle of men and women stopped coming to FZI zazen because of inappropriate texts Hotz had sent to a young woman in that group, which were forwarded to a board member, who to my knowledge took no significant steps.

At the time of each incident, this conduct was brought to the attention of board and senior members, yet no material action was taken. For every woman who found the courage to write an account, consider how many others have yet to come forward. The full scope of this will not be known until FZI makes it safe to do so.

This favoritism extended beyond the personal into the financial: over the span of years, Hotz failed to pay to FZI his promised required house donations to the tune of tens of thousands of dollars, and the board never pressed him for payment even as he continued to liquidate FZI stocks and deprive FZI of the profits to be made from them. When a president is allowed to live free of obligation, financial, ethical, or otherwise, the board has ceased to govern.

In my final attempt to change things from within, I brought forward a draft for an anti-harassment policy to open the discussion of updating an antiquated one that had not been reviewed in years— to enhance basic safeguards to protect the community and FZI. Instead of starting a review process, Hotz summarily proposed to reject the draft proposal as is. This was a procedural maneuver to foreclose debate and defeat this proposal before its merits could even be examined.

Faced with this procedural ambush, the board had no choice but to vote unanimously with Hotz. That vote told me everything I needed to know: that Hotz would continue to prejudice board members against this, and other proposals aimed to protect and enhance the community and FZI. I had to do something about this: I resigned.

The consequences of Hotz's pattern of behavior are visible. Cherished and promising members stop attending, and many feel uneasy about welcoming their friends in good faith. The board received these accounts and as of this writing, have taken only insufficient formal action and not any material remedial action in response. In my view, that failure makes the institution — the board and the First Zen Institute as a whole - accountable for what has been allowed to continue. It is the board's ethical and fiduciary responsibility to address these accounts, to safeguard FZI's resources, and to ensure the safety and integrity of the community.

A sangha where practice is central to its identity and functioning, with only a handful of residents and members to support it, vitally depends on trust, integrity, and psychological safety. Allowing these accounts to go unaddressed undermines those foundations and signals that such conduct is tolerated — a profound institutional betrayal of women seeking to practice Zen. The board must act now, remove Michael Hotz from the premises, and from any position of membership or influence in the community, conduct a third-party investigation, adopt clear institutional safeguards against future abuses of power and misconduct, sexual, financial or otherwise, and create a safe, confidential process for others to come forward. Nothing less will restore FZI as a place of trust, safety, and refuge for those seeking clarity.

Lastly, I write this to ask to be included in all future substantive updates regarding this issue. Though I have separated from the FZI community, I still care about its future. I share this in the hopes that transparency will encourage the accountability FZI deserves.

Sincerely,



10/11/2026



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