

Liberty University Stands by High Schooler Arrested on Gun Charges

Liberty University received national media attention after Chancellor Jerry Falwell Jr. expressed his support for—and promised a scholarship to—Cole Withrow, a North Carolina high school senior who was arrested on April 29 for accidentally leaving a shotgun in his pickup truck in his high school's parking lot.

This bold stance by the university has garnered a strong show of support from all across the country. Emails and messages have been flooding in to members of administration from people pleased to see Liberty standing up for Withrow. Some have even expressed interest in financially giving to the university to create or support scholarship funds for students like Withrow.

Falwell was traveling in North Carolina when he saw Withrow's story on a local news broadcast. He noticed Withrow was wearing a Liberty T-shirt and immediately reached out to him. Falwell learned Withrow was interested in attending Liberty but could not afford it. Falwell told him he would do whatever it takes to ensure Withrow can attend Liberty.

Falwell later learned Withrow's sister, Hannah Walker, is a 2012 graduate of Liberty and currently works for Liberty University Online Student Accounts.

Walker says her brother is "a very caring person" who works hard and "follows through with his commitments." He is an honors student and an Eagle Scout, and Walker says he is very close to his classmates. Withrow is an avid outdoorsman and has been hunting since he was young.

"The worst part about [the arrest] is he was trying to do the

right thing,” Walker says.

As soon as Withrow realized the gun was still in his truck—he had just taken it on a hunting trip over the weekend—he immediately called his mother from the school’s office, Walker says.

Reports indicate that a school official overheard Withrow’s phone call and notified police, who arrested him before his mother arrived.

Now facing a felony charge on his record, Withrow feared he would lose his scholarships and be unable to attend college. “It weighed really hard on him,” Walker says.

She said when Falwell reached out to her brother, and then to herself, it was a great encouragement and an answer to prayer.

“Just the fact that he recognized it meant a lot to my family. But for him to reach out the way that he did and call Cole ... we were so overwhelmed, both of my parents were emotional and excited. It was very much of a weight lifted off,” she says.

Walker adds that Withrow always wanted to go to Liberty—he loved coming to campus events with her—but knew it would likely not be possible because of finances.

For Falwell to contact Withrow and to pledge support for him to attend Liberty, Walker says, is “unbelievable.”

“It is definitely a blessing,” she says. “We are honored that he reached out to us. I know that Cole is really excited. The opportunity that Liberty has is something that separates Liberty from other schools. I have grown so much as a person, so much spiritually being here, and I could want nothing more for my brother—to see God work in his life. I am not the same person I was four years ago. I cannot wait to see how Cole grows and transforms as a person in his experience here too.”