

Pro-Life Group Sues Oklahoma State University for Censoring Students

Cowboys for Life, a student organization represented by Alliance Defending Freedom attorneys, has filed a federal lawsuit against Oklahoma State University after school officials took numerous actions to impede and disrupt the group's pro-life displays on campus.

"Universities should promote, not quarantine, the free exchange of ideas," said Alliance Defending Freedom Litigation Staff Counsel Travis Barham. "Oklahoma State University does not have free reign to censor students. The university can't exile this club's displays or restrict students from distributing literature simply because their materials challenge a narrow orthodoxy or offend the hyper-sensitive feelings of administrators."

Beginning in July of last year, members of Cowboys for Life sought to reserve space for some **pro-life** displays in October near the Student Union, a highly traveled area of campus that student groups regularly use for such events. Using materials from Justice for All, the Cowboys sought to highlight numerous facets of the pro-life perspective and to converse with passing students about abortion.

But OSU officials denied the club's requests to reserve areas near the Student Union because, the officials claimed, the displays might offend some people. Instead, the university relegated the displays to a less-traveled area of campus and then required Cowboys for Life to place "warning" signs around the displays, further discouraging students from approaching them.

When members of the group tried to distribute literature near

the Student Union, OSU officials disrupted their efforts, demanding that the students leave the area or post additional “warning” signs. After the event, officials coordinated and launched an investigation of the students and claimed they had violated the Student Code of Conduct as they expressed their pro-life beliefs.

“The **First Amendment** exists to protect our freedom to share ideas freely and to prevent the government from suppressing speech it deems ‘unacceptable,’” Barham explained. “Universities are supposed to be ‘marketplaces of ideas’ where all ideas—not just those favored by university officials—are welcomed and vigorously debated. OSU has no business breaking the law and stifling pro-life expression on campus as it did to Cowboys for Life.”

Alliance Defending Freedom attorneys have successfully defended pro-life student groups seeking to use Justice for All materials at other university campuses, including the University of Colorado at Boulder, the University of Texas at Austin, the University of Houston, and Arizona State University.

Cowboys for Life v. Sampson was filed Friday in the U.S. District Court for the Western District of Oklahoma.