

Snow College Officials Call Christian Club's Message 'Poor Taste'

Alliance Defending Freedom filed a federal lawsuit Monday against Utah's Snow College on behalf of a Christian student group banned from including religious speech as part of a homecoming event. The college, located in the town of Ephraim, also denied the club benefits that it extended to other groups.

"Colleges are supposed to be the marketplace of ideas, not centers of censorship," said Travis Barham, Alliance Defending Freedom litigation staff counsel. "America's colleges and universities should recognize that the **First Amendment** protects the freedom of all students to gather with those of like mind and to express their ideas, including religious students and religious ideas.

"By refusing to treat faith-based student organizations the same as other student groups and by excluding religious speech from homecoming events, Snow College officials have ignored this basic principle," Barham added. "But we hope they will quickly do the right thing, respect our clients' freedoms and eliminate the need for continuing to pursue this lawsuit."

Snow College policies treat student organizations that associate with "religious institutions" very differently than other student groups. While most groups can meet in campus facilities without charge, advertise their events without fees and seek funding for their activities, Snow College prohibits religious student groups—including Solid Rock Christian Club—from doing the same.

In addition, Snow College officials prohibited Solid Rock from displaying a Christian message and cross as part of the

school's "Paint the Town" homecoming event, in which student groups decorate the front windows of participating local businesses.

When Solid Rock began decorating its assigned window with a cross and a message that incorporated the homecoming theme with the group's Christian message, school officials instructed the club to stop, claiming the group was not allowed to "paint any religious symbols or anything related to religion." Later, college officials removed the students' message from another building, telling the students in an email that their Christian message "is in poor taste."

Alliance Defending Freedom first sent Snow College a letter explaining how the school violated the constitutionally protected freedoms of the student members of the club. The letter explained how the college created a forum for student speech and that the "Supreme Court has repeatedly rejected university efforts to discriminate against religious speech" by excluding it from such forums.

A state assistant attorney general replied on behalf of the college, saying that religious views would continue to be prohibited from the homecoming event. That prompted ADF attorneys to file the lawsuit *Solid Rock Christian Club v. Wyatt* in the U.S. District Court for the District of Utah, though they have elected not to serve the legal papers yet to give college officials time to change their policies quickly and eliminate the need for continued legal action.