

Student Claims Community College Rejected Application Because of Christian Faith

Brandon Jenkins was denied entry to a radiation therapy program at the Community College of Baltimore County because of his Christian faith and was advised to not wear his religion on his sleeve, a lawsuit filed in federal court alleges.

Now, I have to admit to being a bit skeptical when I first heard about Jenkins' plight—seeing how this is the age of tolerance and diversity. But any doubt I had melted away after his attorney showed me the proverbial smoking gun.

David French, an attorney with the American Center for Law and Justice, has an email written to his client by Adrienne Dougherty, the director of the college's radiation therapy program.

In the email Dougherty explains why Jenkins was denied entry into the program. She wrote that while his grades were good, there were other students with higher grade point averages. Applicants had to have a 2.5 overall GPA to be eligible. Still, it seemed plausible that there were other candidates with higher averages.

The college also took issue with his desire to stay in Maryland after he got his degree.

"I feel that I would be doing you a disservice if I allowed you into the program and you are not able to find a job based on your past," she wrote.

Mr. French acknowledged that his client had a single criminal charge on his record—dating back more than 10 years. Early in

the admission process, Jenkins asked if that would be a problem, and he was assured it would not hamper his effort.

But then, Dougherty dropped the bombshell, the lawsuit alleges.

"I understand that religion is a major part of your life and that was evident in your recommendation letters, however, this field is not the place for religion," she wrote. "We have many patients who come to us for treatment from many different religions and some who believe in nothing at all."

And then, Dougherty offered what I imagine in her mind must have been helpful advice in this age of tolerance and diversity.

"If you interview in the future, you may want to leave your thoughts and beliefs out of the interview process," she wrote.

This field is not the place for religion.

"I was astonished by the email," French told me in a telephone conversation. "While colleges routinely discriminate against Christians, rarely do they state their discrimination so explicitly."

In a letter to the ACLJ, a law firm representing the community college, defended Dougherty's statement.

"Stated bluntly, that is not bad advice," attorney Peter Saucier wrote. "Mr. Jenkins was not advised to ignore, change or deny his religious views. The suggestion simply was that he not wear them on his sleeve as his best qualification."

So you might be wondering—how did the college know that Jenkins is a Christian?

Well, during the interview process he was asked the following question: What is the most important thing to you? According to the lawsuit, Jenkins replied, "My God."

French said there were no follow-up questions and his client did not mention his religious beliefs. But that brief mention of God, coupled with recommendation letters that made references to faith, were enough to disqualify Jenkins from the program.

Still, the college denied they discriminated against the man. Instead, they argue they were just trying to help him refocus and succeed.

“Her words may have been inartfully stated, but the fact is that in any secular job or program interview it is better to have a concrete reason for wanting to undertake the training at hand than to say only that God directed one to do it,” Saucier wrote to the ACLJ. “That is true for every job from astronaut to attorney.”

It sounds to me like the Community College of Baltimore County has a “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” religion policy.

The ACLJ’s lawsuit alleges the college violated the Establishment Clause of the U.S. Constitution and they want their client granted admission to the radiation therapy program. A college spokesperson told me they have not yet seen the lawsuit.

In fairness to the college, it’s not like they are kicking him out of the school. Dougherty’s email clearly shows that she was offering him alternative degree paths. She went so far as to suggest he could work on a degree in mental health study—and noted in her email that he would make a “great candidate.”

I’ve never met Mr. Jenkins, but he sounds like a stand-up guy. Based on the court documents I’ve read, it sounds as if he took a wrong turn in life. But through his faith in God, he made amends and got back on the right path.

Here’s a man who’s trying to better himself with a college

education. Here's a man trying to live the American dream only to be told he can't do that because he believes in God. That should spark a furious fire in the heart of every red-blooded, freedom-loving American.

The ACLJ lawsuit names four administrators: Sandra Kurtinitis, Mark McColloch, Richard Lilley and Adrienne Dougherty as defendants. Should they be found guilty of discriminating against this man because of his faith, they should be fired. American tax dollars should not be used to fund the salaries of religious bigots.

Todd Starnes *is host of Fox News & Commentary, heard on hundreds of radio stations. Sign up for his American Dispatch newsletter, be sure to join his Facebook page, and follow him on Twitter. His latest book is God Less America.*