

Student Sues Michigan School for Persecution for Sharing His Christian Beliefs

A Michigan high school student has filed a federal lawsuit against his school after he was suspended for three days for sharing his Christian beliefs with another student in a hallway at the school and in a private text conversation off school property.

The Great Lakes Justice Center, a nonprofit religious rights law firm, representing Plainwell High School junior David Stout, filed the lawsuit naming the Plainwell Community Schools district, Plainwell High School's principal and assistant principal, as well as the school's two band directors, as defendants.

According to court documents, Stout shared "his Christian beliefs about heterosexual/homosexual conduct in a series of private text messages with another child. The communication did not occur on the school grounds or campus, with school property, at a school-sponsored event or field trip, nor was it connected to any functions of the school in any way."

School officials also allegedly punished Stout for not policing and reporting other students' inappropriate jokes and instructed the teen that he must stop posting his religious comments on all his social media platforms.

In addition, he was also disciplined because of some offensive behavior by others, in which he did not participate and was not aware of, at a football game last October.

Stout's complaint alleges the school overstepped the law in the following ways:

- Violating his First Amendment constitutional rights to free speech and to the free exercise of religion;
- Violating his Michigan constitutional rights;
- Creating policies that are unconstitutionally vague and unenforceable;
- Exceeding the boundaries of the Matt Epling Safe School Law by attempting “to police or punish speech or expression that does not occur ‘at school.’”

In his lawsuit, Stout is requesting a declaratory judgment that the school district violated his constitutional rights. The complaint asks for reversal of the disciplinary action in his school record, payment of financial damages and attorney fees.

“My client’s religious speech and beliefs should be treated with tolerance and respect. Public schools may not violate the Constitution and enforce a heckler’s veto of student speech,” Great Lakes Justice Center Senior Legal Counsel David A. Kallman said in a statement.

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