

University Deems Pro-Life Display Too 'Controversial'

Alliance Defending Freedom attorneys filed a federal lawsuit Tuesday against Eastern Michigan University on behalf of a pro-life student organization. University officials denied the group funding from mandatory student activity fees based on its "political or ideological" views even though the university funds other groups involved in political and ideological speech.

"Universities should encourage, not shut down, the free exchange of ideas," said Senior Legal Counsel David Hacker. "The university funded the advocacy of other student organizations but singled out Students for Life for exclusion based purely upon its viewpoint."

In February, Students for Life at Eastern Michigan University applied for student fee funding to host a pro-life display on campus called the Genocide Awareness Project, a traveling photo-mural exhibit which compares the contemporary genocide of abortion to historically recognized forms of genocide. EMU denied the request because they deemed the photos of the aborted babies and the event as too controversial, biased and one-sided.

The lawsuit, *Students for Life at Eastern Michigan University v. Parker*, notes that EMU officials have been inconsistent with their funding guidelines and have allocated the same funds to political and ideological speech discussing "welfare rights, women's and abortion rights, student activist training and race-conscious issues, just to name a few."

The lawsuit also explains that the First Amendment's Freedom of Speech Clause "prohibits content and viewpoint discrimination in a public university's allocation of

mandatory student fee funding.” Moreover, “the government may not regulate speech based on policies that permit arbitrary, discriminatory and overzealous enforcement.” As the U.S. Supreme Court has affirmed, “viewpoint neutrality” must be the operating principle of student fees and funding.

“The constitutional freedoms of pro-life student organizations should be recognized by university officials just as they recognize those freedoms for other student groups,” added Senior Counsel Kevin Theriot. “We hope EMU revises its student funding policy to include all groups, regardless of their political or ideological viewpoint.”