



SPEECH FIRST

University of Illinois: Settlement Summary

On May 28, 2019, Speech First sued the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign to defend our student members' First Amendment rights. We challenged four policies: the University's insistence on preapproving political flyers, its Bias Assessment Response Team (BART), its housing-related Bias Incident Protocol (BIP), and its No Contact Directives (NCD), which had been used to silence constitutionally protected speech.

Shortly before the deadline for Supreme Court review, the University settled the case. As a result of Speech First's lawsuit, the University agreed to forever repeal its unconstitutional flyer policy. The University also made specific guarantees about students' free-speech rights concerning the bias-response teams and the issuance of No Contact Directives. Prior to this settlement agreement, the University had never made those representations anywhere in its policies.

"These policy changes clarify that the university administration may not intimidate students into silence by accusing them of 'bias,'" said Speech First president and founder Nicole Neily. "As an alumna, I was particularly dismayed to see an institution that I once loved employing draconian, unconstitutional policies to muzzle speech with which they disagreed – my fellow Illini deserve better, and we are proud that this settlement makes clearer where the school's authority ends."

The settlement codifies limitations on BART/BIP/NCD that the school claims have always existed - but that it hasn't acknowledged until now. Students now have greater certainty when dealing with these programs what their rights are, which we consider an important step.