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SPEECH FIRST

Speech First Secures Important Settlement Requiring the University of Houston to Protect Student Speech

Houston, TX (June 10, 2022) – Speech First has secured a decisive [settlement](#) from the University of Houston in [Speech First v. Khator, et al.](#) after the university unconstitutionally chilled student speech through its overbroad “harassment” policy.

“This is a huge win for the First Amendment,” said **Speech First’s Executive Director Cherise Trump**. “It sends a message to the University of Houston and other universities that they will be held accountable if they enact unconstitutional policies on campus. Not only did we restore students’ free speech rights by eliminating the university’s “harassment” policy, but the university agreed to adopt a new policy that complies with the standard laid out by the Supreme Court in *Davis v. Monroe County Board of Education*. This means that the university cannot restrict a student’s speech unless it is so ‘severe, pervasive, and objectively offensive’ as to deny a student an equal access to education.”

“In addition to changing its policy, the University of Houston will pay Speech First fees in the amount of \$30,000. That’s three years’ worth of tuition at UH.”

“Universities across the country should be put on notice that overbroad policies designed to chill student speech will not be tolerated. Every institution of higher learning should protect freedom of expression, freedom of thought, and the open exchange of ideas, not muzzle students with speech codes that disregard federal guidelines and the U.S. Constitution.”

Background:

Speech First filed its complaint against the University of Houston on February 23, 2022, in the U.S. District Court for the Southern District of Texas. Speech First alleged that the University’s “harassment” policy was unconstitutionally overbroad and punished speech based on content and viewpoint. The policy’s expansive definition of “harassment” prohibited a wide array of protected speech, including “denigrating jokes” and “negative stereotyping.”

Under the harassment policy, the University reserved the right to punish student speech anywhere, anytime: on campus, off campus, or on social media. Supreme Court precedent dictates that colleges can only restrict speech when it is so “severe, pervasive, and objectively offensive” that it crosses the line into harassing conduct.

See the original press release [here](#) and the complaint [here](#).

The U.S. District Court for the Southern District of Texas then granted Speech First's Motion for [Preliminary Injunction](#) to prohibit the University from enforcing wide-sweeping restrictions on protected First Amendment expression. The Court held that Speech First had standing to challenge the University's "harassment" policy and that it was likely to prevail on the merits of its claim.

About Speech First

Speech First is a nationwide membership association of students, parents, faculty, alumni, and concerned citizens. Speech First is dedicated to preserving civil rights secured by law, including the freedom of speech guaranteed by the First Amendment. Speech First seeks to protect the rights of students and others at colleges and universities through litigation and other lawful means.

To schedule an engagement with Speech First, please contact Caroline Thorman at caroline@athospr.com and info@athospr.com.

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