

The *Jack Denton* Case

Case Name: *Denton v. Thrasher*

Case Action: Case filed in Federal Court on August 31, 2020

Significance: Whether public universities can punish and discriminate against students for expressing their religious beliefs.



Background: Jack Denton is a Catholic student at Florida State University where he has faithfully served on the student senate for three years, most recently as senate president. Jack is also an active member of the Catholic community and regularly participates in a Catholic group chat, where like-minded students can share prayer requests and words of encouragement. When a fellow student sent a video to the chat, Jack pointed out that watching this video would generate funds for organizations which hold and promote views that are explicitly anti-Catholic. It wasn't long before Jack's peers retaliated against him, circulating screenshots of the private Catholic group chat across campus, and eventually to the student senate. The senate held a special meeting, where Jack was forced out of his position as student senate president and humiliated in front of his peers for simply expressing his deeply held religious beliefs in a private setting. Jack appealed his unjust removal from office to the school, but university officials have done nothing to restore Jack's First Amendment freedoms. No one should be forced to silence their core convictions just to keep a job or participate in student government. ADF attorneys filed suit on behalf of Jack Denton to ensure that no student's religious freedom is violated at Florida State University.

Key Points

- Students don't forfeit their religious freedom when they step foot on to a public university campus.
- Public universities cannot allow discrimination against students for their political or religious beliefs.
- No student should feel forced to silence their deepest moral convictions in order to keep a job or participate in student government.
- The First Amendment is universal and extends to people of all beliefs. Universities that discriminate against religious students violate the First Amendment.

Key Facts

- Jack was sharing widely known Catholic beliefs with other Catholic students in a private Catholic group chat.
- Jack was discriminated against and removed from his position as student senate president simply for expressing his religious beliefs.
- Speaking with like-minded groups—or holding Catholic views—should not be disqualifying for academic service.

The Bottom Line: All students should be able to peacefully share their views with other students, without fear of punishment or retaliation. No one should be forced to silence their beliefs just to keep a job.