

The *Morrison* Case

Case Name: Morrison v. Town of Middleborough

Case Status: Complaint filed on May 17, 2023

Significance: Whether students can be forced out of the classroom for exercising their free speech rights.



Background: Liam Morrison is a 7th grade student at John T. Nichols, Jr. Middle School in Middleborough, MA. One day he wore a shirt to school that stated, “There are only two genders.” The school’s acting principal pulled Liam out of the classroom and ordered him to change his shirt, or he could not return to class. Liam politely declined to remove his shirt, so his father had to pick him up from school for the day. Liam was prohibited from wearing the shirt to school again because the school said it violated the dress code policy. Two months later, Liam wore a shirt saying, “There are censored genders.” Despite the lack of disturbance or disruption, Liam was again singled out and ordered to remove his shirt. Liam complied with the administration and took off the shirt because he did not want to miss another day of school. Liam faces future threats of escalating discipline and possible suspension. The school dress code policy permits students to convey a multitude of messages concerning virtually unlimited topics on their shirts. Liam’s fear of punishment severely limits his constitutionally protected expression at NMS because the school has interpreted the dress code to disqualify speech they do not like. NMS has abandoned the fundamental constitutional principle of free speech, squashing any possibility of viewpoint diversity on school grounds. Alliance Defending Freedom filed suit on behalf of Liam Morrison to protect students’ rights to speak freely and without censorship.

Key Points

- This isn’t just about a shirt – it’s about a public school telling a 7th grader that he can’t wear a shirt with a message that’s important to him.
- Public school officials cannot censor a student’s free speech by forcing him to remove a shirt that states a scientific fact.
- No student should be punished for peacefully responding to the school’s messages about sex and gender that ignore biological reality.

Key Facts

- All students have the constitutional right to express their speech without fear of being punished by school officials.
- John T. Nichols Middle School censored Liam simply because it disagreed with Liam’s beliefs.
- The First Amendment protects people of all beliefs.

The Bottom Line: Students don’t forfeit their free speech when they walk into the school building, nor should they be forced out of the classroom for exercising their free speech rights.