

American Civil Liberties Union of Wisconsin: Sends demand letter to stop sexual harassment in Wisconsin school district

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MILWAUKEE — The American Civil Liberties Union of Wisconsin and the ACLU sent a letter to Kenosha Unified School District (KUSD) demanding the district take prompt corrective action regarding serious concerns of pervasive gender discrimination, including sexual harassment, body-shaming, and victim-blaming. The two schools named in the demand letter are Tremper High School and Bradford High School.

According to parents and students, in March 2018, cheer coaches at the annual Tremper High School cheer banquet — featuring over 150 people in attendance — distributed offensive and objectifying awards to female cheerleaders including the “Big Boobie” award and the “Big Booty” award. Records obtained by the ACLU show that parents complained to the Tremper principal and the director of student leadership and were told there was no evidence of wrongdoing on part of the cheer coaches.

“It was heartbreaking to see the girls accept awards for things that are inherently damaging to their worth and identity. My concerns multiplied as one district administrator after another disregarded the complaints. Ultimately there was no substance in the district’s actions, the coaches are still directly working with the

squad without any understanding of how their actions harmed these impressionable young women,” said the ACLU’s client and parent of one of the cheerleaders in attendance.

“KUSD seems to have a practice of sweeping harassment under the rug or failing to acknowledge sexual harassment is a serious offense,” said Asma Kadri, staff attorney with the ACLU of Wisconsin. “From Ash Whitaker to the disparate enforcement of its dress code against female students and now this, KUSD has run out of explanations for its failure to take action to protect students from sex-based discrimination and promote a learning environment free from harassment and discrimination as required by federal law and the Constitution.”

“We’re glad to hear that Tremper High School will no longer award student cheerleaders for the size of their breasts, after hearing from us,” said Emma Roth, Equal Justice Works Fellow, ACLU. “This is a step in the right direction. However, they need to take further corrective action, including district-wide training on sexual harassment.”

The ACLU and ACLU of Wisconsin call on KUSD to take concrete action in response to these troubling reports and promptly enforce its policies so that all students are treated equally, regardless of gender. Should the district fail to take corrective action, the ACLU and ACLU of Wisconsin will consider further legal steps.

The demand letter is online

here: <https://www.aclu.org/letter/aclu-demand-letter-kenosha-unified-school-district>

Read more from our attorneys

here: <https://www.aclu.org/blog/womens-rights/womens-rights-education/wisconsin-school-district-shrugged-after-high-school>

Link to banquet video:

https://www.dropbox.com/sh/rwxxww6c0q477dk/AADu6_f48iMyknPq_KA55DFRa?dl=0.