

Wisconsin Institute for Law & Liberty: Wins campus free speech victory

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Contact:

Collin Roth | WILL Director of Communication
collin@will-law.org | 414-727-7418

The News: United States District Court Judge William Griesbach issued a [summary judgement order](#) Friday in favor of Polly Olsen, a WILL client who had her First Amendment rights violated by Northeast Wisconsin Technical College (NWTC). WILL filed a lawsuit in federal court against NWTC when Olsen was prevented from handing out religious-themed valentines on Valentine's Day 2018 due to the school's Public Assembly Policy.

Judge Griesbach's [order](#) reads in part, "NWTC had no more right to prevent [Olsen] from handing out individual Valentines than it did to stop her from wishing each individual to have a "good morning and a blessed day."

The Quotes: WILL President and General Counsel Rick Esenberg said, "This case was very simple. NWTC, through their Public Assembly Policy, sought to restrain and contain the First Amendment rights of students. That is, and always has been, unconstitutional. We are pleased the Court agreed, and we are thankful to Polly Olsen for stepping up to defend not only her own rights, but the rights of all students."

Polly Olsen said, "While this lawsuit was personal, it was never just about me. When my First Amendment rights were violated by NWTC, I knew I had to stand up for my rights. With the Court's decision, it is my hope that NWTC and colleges everywhere

will work to expand and embrace, not constrict, the First Amendment rights of all students.”

Background: On [Valentine’s Day, 2018](#), Olsen began handing out religiously-themed valentines with innocent messages such as “Jesus Loves You.” After someone complained of this “suspicious activity,” campus security was dispatched and escorted Olsen to the campus security office. At a private room, she was told that some people might find her valentines “offensive” and that she was “soliciting” on campus outside of the designated free speech zone.

[WILL filed a federal lawsuit in September 2018](#) arguing NWTC violated Olsen’s First Amendment rights and the school’s Public Assembly Policy was unconstitutional. The case was filed in the U.S. Eastern District of Wisconsin.

On Valentine’s Day 2019, [WILL released security footage](#) showing the incident that resulted in attention from campus security. The video, which WILL has submitted to the court, shows Polly innocently approaching students and handing out Valentines at a campus building. The footage of the incident that NWTC characterized as “disturbing” the learning environment lasts just over a minute.

In [March 2019](#), Polly Olsen was invited to the White House for an executive order signing ceremony with President Trump on campus free speech. At the event, Olsen said, “They were trying to shut me up. I’m just one of many students that are out there that schools and universities are trying to shut down, sweep it under the rug and make them be quiet. And I told them that I am not going to be quiet this time. I am going to talk to anyone and everyone I can about our freedom of speech in this country.”

Read More:

- [Summary Judgement Order](#), September 13, 2019
- [WILL’s Complaint](#), September 4, 2018
- Rick Esenberg and Polly Olsen appear on [Fox & Friends](#)