

ACLU: Criticizes DPI decision that ignores pervasive discrimination in Chippewa Falls Area Unified School District

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CHIPPEWA FALLS — The ACLU of Wisconsin criticized the Department of Public Instruction's decision today that allows the Chippewa Falls Area Unified School District (CFAUSD) to continue to ignore the discriminatory environment in its schools.

In September, the ACLU of Wisconsin filed an appeal on behalf of the Cultivative Coalition, an organization of current and former students of the CFAUSD who experienced persistent and severe discriminatory harassment at school. The appeal challenged the District's perfunctory and evasive handling of the pupil discrimination complaint that the ACLU filed earlier this year on behalf of the Coalition.

In its decision, DPI chastised the District for failing to "investigate the complaint's allegations to determine whether facts exist that are sufficient to find a hostile environment." DPI warned the District that any future investigations "must make this important initial finding." However, DPI did not reverse the District's decision for the technical reason that the members of the Cultivative Coalition had already graduated and, therefore, would not benefit from any corrective action by the District.

Today's decision means that the District can ignore the multitude of evidence provided by the Cultivative Coalition that shows pervasive harassment in the District.

“We’re disappointed by today’s decision by DPI, and concerned that it may lead to more unchecked harassment of students enrolled in CFAUSD. Despite the decision, we are proud of the members of the Cultivative Coalition who were brave enough to take a stand and share their stories of racial, gender, and sexual harassment,” said Elisabeth Lambert, staff attorney with the ACLU of Wisconsin. “Even though this decision is disappointing, we remain committed to our fight to end discrimination in Wisconsin schools.”

“While today’s decision is not what we hoped for, we are empowered by the students and families who came forward to share their traumatic experiences of discrimination in the Chippewa Falls Area Unified School District,” the Cultivative Coalition said in a statement.

“Cultivative Coalition and our allies will continue to advocate for the students and families whose lives have been forever altered by the pervasive discriminatory behaviors that plague CFAUSD hallways. Unfortunately, this decision means that marginalized students and their families in the CFAUSD will continue to experience the lifelong pain of unaddressed harassment and discrimination.

Our platform and organization will remain a place for marginalized students to share their experiences, and our mission endures: to confront discrimination and to create an educational space where all people feel a shared sense of belonging.

To current, former, and future students and families of the CFAUSD, this decision is not the end of our fight. We will continue our longstanding battle for inclusivity and hope you will join us in vocal opposition to the discriminatory behavior students continue to endure at CFAUSD.”

This release is available online:

<https://www.aclu-wi.org/en/press-releases/aclu-wisconsin-criticizes-dpi-decision-ignores-pervasive-discrimination-chippewa>