

DeJong v. Pembroke

Case Name: *DeJong v. Pembroke*

Status: Case filed in Federal Court May 31, 2022

Significance: Whether public universities can punish students for expressing their political and religious viewpoints.



Background: Maggie DeJong is a recent graduate of Southern Illinois University Edwardsville’s Art Therapy program. She has spent the last three years pursuing her master’s degree in Art Therapy with the goal of one day counseling child trauma victims. While she was a student at SIUE, the school informed Maggie that three students had taken out “no contact orders” against her but the university gave no reason as to why. Maggie contacted Alliance Defending Freedom to send a letter on her behalf. It was discovered the school singled Maggie out for punishment simply for freely expressing her constitutionally protected views. Through the no-contact orders, the university forbade Maggie from any form of engagement with the three students and denied her constitutional right to defend herself against their allegations. Maggie was prevented from speaking to them in their shared class, at their jobs in the same building, and in public spaces under threat of further punishment from the school. On May 31, ADF attorneys filed a lawsuit on behalf of Maggie to protect the speech of all students at Southern Illinois University Edwardsville.

Key Points:

- Universities cannot censor students because of their religious or political views.
- Universities cannot ban students from speaking to fellow students or fully participating in their classes simply for expressing their views.
- It is extremely concerning that the school where future therapists are being trained allows discrimination against students based on their religious and political views.

Key Facts:

- The university notified Maggie that she was not allowed to speak with the students on or off campus and provided no explanation.
- The university violated Maggie’s free-speech and due process rights by issuing an unconstitutional no contact order.
- Maggie was punished for speaking her personal political and religious viewpoints. The Constitution protects the right of all Americans to express their beliefs without fear of censorship and punishment.

The Bottom Line: Universities cannot discipline students for their political and religious views especially without giving them the opportunity to defend themselves.