



FACT SHEET

Sonnier v. Southeastern Louisiana University

ABOUT Sonnier v. Southeastern Louisiana University

Jeremy Sonnier and his three friends arrived at Southeastern Louisiana University in November 2007 to share their faith with others at a campus location already approved for outside speakers. Shortly after, campus police told Sonnier that he needed to apply for a permit for such activity, even though speakers over the years have been freely allowed to distribute literature and speak on their beliefs without one. School officials stated that a permit application must be filed seven days prior to engaging in free speech after denying Sonnier the right to hand out tracts, display banners, and share the Gospel. If granted a permit, outside speakers are only allowed to exercise their “free speech” during a designated two-hour time block per week. Applicants could also be required to pay a fee, divulge their Social Security number, and submit other information for permission to speak. According to SLU and its speech policy instituted in 2004, Sonnier’s religious message is banned from campus, which is a violation of his constitutional rights. Most of the university campus is open to the public and blends into the surrounding community--complete with grassy knolls, pedestrian malls, public ways, and park areas with benches and tables--making it quite suitable for public conversations.

CURRENT STATUS OF Sonnier v. Southeastern Louisiana University AS OF 3/2/09

ADF attorneys filed a lawsuit in November 2008 with the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Louisiana on behalf of Jeremy Sonnier against Southeastern Louisiana University for unconstitutionally blocking his free speech by requiring him to obtain a permit in order to exercise his free speech rights on campus. ADF attorneys also filed a motion for preliminary injunction to keep the school from prohibiting Sonnier’s free speech as the trial continues, which ADF Litigation Counsel Jonathan Scruggs will ask the court to grant in a March 3 hearing.

FOCUS OF HEARING – WHAT IS AT STAKE?

Whether Southeastern Louisiana University will be allowed to continue to enforce an unconstitutional policy discriminating against the religious speech of outside speakers is at the heart of the issue at the hearing. If the motion for preliminary injunction is granted, Sonnier will not be prohibited from sharing his faith on campus as the trial proceeds. Such a ruling would also indicate that Sonnier is likely to succeed on the merits of his case, which would be an important victory for anyone who values their right to speak freely in public venues.

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ABOUT ADF

ADF is a legal alliance of Christian attorneys and like-minded organizations defending the right of people to freely live out their faith. Launched in 1994, ADF employs a unique combination of [strategy, training, funding, and litigation](#) to protect and preserve religious liberty, the sanctity of life, marriage, and the family.

ABOUT Jonathan Scruggs

Jonathan Scruggs serves as litigation counsel with the Alliance Defense Fund at its Memphis Regional Service Center in Tennessee. He earned his J.D. at Harvard Law School and is admitted to practice in the state of Tennessee.