



FACT SHEET ***Ward v. Wilbanks***

ABOUT Ward v. Wilbanks

Eastern Michigan University expelled Julea Ward from its graduate counseling program in March 2009 because she was unwilling to violate and change her religious beliefs as a condition to getting her degree. EMU initiated the disciplinary process that ultimately resulted in Ward's expulsion shortly after she enrolled in a counseling practicum course in January 2009, when she was assigned a potential client seeking assistance regarding a homosexual relationship. Recognizing the potential values conflict with the client, and knowing she could not affirm the client's homosexual relationship without violating her religious beliefs regarding extra-marital sexual relationships, Ward asked her supervisor how to handle the matter. Consistent with ethical and professional standards regarding referral, Ward was advised to reassign the potential client to a different counselor, which she did. Shortly thereafter, EMU informed Ward that the only way she could stay in the counseling program would be if she agreed to undergo a "remediation" program. Its purpose was to help her "see the error of her ways" and change her "belief system" as it relates to counseling about homosexual relationships. Ward did not agree to these unconstitutional conditions. At a subsequent disciplinary hearing, EMU faculty denigrated Ward's Christian views and asked several inappropriate and intrusive questions about her religious beliefs. Among other things, one EMU faculty member asked Ward whether she viewed her "brand" of Christianity as superior to that of other Christians and another took her on what the faculty member called a "theological bout" designed to show her the error of her religious thinking. A faculty committee then dismissed her from the counseling program. Ward appealed, but the dean of EMU College of Education upheld the dismissal.

CURRENT STATUS OF Ward v. Wilbanks AS OF 12/19/2011

ADF attorneys representing Ward filed a lawsuit with the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Michigan against EMU officials in April 2009. In July 2010, the court granted summary judgment in favor of EMU on all of Ward's claims. ADF attorneys appealed to the U.S. Court of Appeals for the 6th Circuit, and ADF Legal Counsel Jeremy Tedesco presented oral argument before the court on Oct. 4. The decision is pending.

FOCUS OF HEARING – WHAT IS AT STAKE?

The court's ruling will determine if public university officials violate the U.S. Constitution if they...

- Refuse to accommodate a student's sincerely held religious beliefs by allowing the student, consistent with ethical and professional standards, to refer a client to another qualified counselor when there is a religiously-based need to do so.
- Attack and denigrate the student's beliefs and require her to be willing to violate and change them as a condition to getting a degree.

CONTACT ADF MEDIA RELATIONS

Phone: (480) 444-0020, x. 17102 / E-mail: adfmedia@telladf.org / Web: www.adfmedia.org/home/contact

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 Jeremy Tedesco

Jeremy Tedesco (tuh-DESS'-ko) serves as legal counsel with the Alliance Defense Fund at its headquarters in Scottsdale, Arizona, where he currently leads litigation efforts to protect the rights of Christian students, faculty, and staff at public schools across the nation. In 2004, he earned his J.D. from the Regent University School of Law. Tedesco is admitted to the State Bar of Arizona; the Supreme and District Court of Arizona; the District Court of Colorado; the U.S. Courts of Appeal for the 2nd, 3rd, 5th, 6th, 7th, and 9th Circuits; and the U.S. Supreme Court.

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