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Henderson v. Springfield R-12 School District

United States Court of Appeals, Eighth Circuit - December 30, 2025 - F.4th - 2025 WL 3762347

Two school district employees brought § 1983 action against school district, school superintendent, and other staff, alleging that while attending a mandatory district-wide equity training program for staff, the school district engaged in viewpoint discrimination, caused attendees to self-censor, and/or forced attendees to accept beliefs with which they did not agree, in violation of their First Amendment rights.

The United States District Court for the Western District of Missouri denied employees' motion for summary judgment and granted summary judgment to defendants, and subsequently granted defendants' motion for attorney fees. Employees appealed. A panel of the Court of Appeals affirmed the grant of summary judgment to school district but reversed the award of attorney fees. The Court of Appeals granted rehearing en banc and vacated the panel opinion.

On rehearing en banc, the Court of Appeals held that:

- Consequences identified by school district for not agreeing with its views during training gave rise to injury in fact required for Article III standing to bring chilled speech claim;
- Employees suffered injury in fact from being deprived of their First Amendment right to be free from compelled speech, as required to have Article III standing;\Genuine dispute of fact existed as to whether school district's alleged compelled speech was pursuant to employees' official duties; and
- Employees' claims did not present frivolous or groundless issues of Article III standing, and thus, district court improperly awarded school district attorney fees.

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