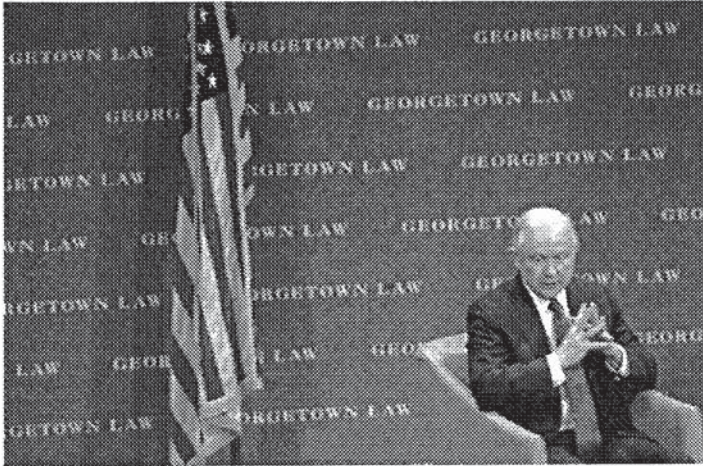


GOVERNMENT

Sessions' Justice Dept. Is Wading Into Another Campus Free-Speech Case

By Andy Thomason | OCTOBER 24, 2017



Win McNamee/Getty Images

Jeff Sessions, the U.S. attorney general, indicated in a September speech that the Justice Department would very likely weigh in on cases in which students alleged that their free-speech rights had been violated on college campuses.

The U.S. Department of Justice filed a statement of interest on Tuesday in a lawsuit filed against Pierce College, a California community college, on the side of a student who says administrators there violated his free-speech rights.

The move, which Mr. Sessions himself forecast in a fiery speech he gave last month at Georgetown University, provides further evidence that the Trump administration will make fighting what it views as campus censorship a priority of the Justice Department.

In the statement, the department throws its weight behind Kevin Shaw, a student at Pierce who says administrators stopped him from passing out copies of the U.S. Constitution because he was not in the campus's "free speech zone." He also claimed he was told he needed a permit to use the free-speech zone.

Mr. Shaw filed a lawsuit in March against the college, saying it had violated his First Amendment rights. (At that time, the college referred an inquiry from the *Los Angeles Times* to the community college's district, which declined to comment on the lawsuit but said the system "firmly stands behind every student's right to free expression.")

In the statement Tuesday, the department took issue with the campus's alleged permitting requirement, and its use of the free-speech zone.

This isn't the first case that has provoked a statement of interest from Mr. Sessions' department. Last month, it filed a brief in support of a student who was suing Georgia Gwinnett College, claiming that the college had infringed upon his religious-expression and free-speech rights.

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