



GREAT LAKES —JUSTICE CENTER—

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TEMPORARY RESTRAINING ORDER GRANTED IN SOCCER ATHLETES FEDERAL CIVIL RIGHTS LAWSUIT AGAINST WESTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY

Lansing, Michigan – Federal District Court Judge Paul L. Maloney issued an order effective at 1:30 p.m. today granting the Temporary Restraining Order requested by four women athletes at Western Michigan University (WMU) (see the link below for a copy of the seven-page order). As a result of the order, Judge Maloney enjoined WMU from carrying out its threat to kick all four athletes off the soccer team later today for refusing to take the Covid-19 vaccine against their religious objections. A hearing date has been set for September 9, 2021, at 1:30 p.m. in Judge Maloney’s courtroom in Kalamazoo, Michigan.

The Great Lakes Justice Center (GLJC), on behalf of four top WMU soccer athletes, filed a federal civil rights lawsuit in Grand Rapids on Monday challenging WMU’s unlawful denial of their request for religious accommodation from the college’s vaccine mandate to participate in sports. The students requested injunctive relief to allow them to remain on their soccer team while litigation is pending. All four athletes are on scholarship and include two team captains. WMU recently instituted a requirement for all its athletes in all sports to take the Covid-19 vaccine or forfeit their right to play intercollegiate sports. No similar vaccine requirement exists for any other students at WMU. Other universities, including MSU and U of M, are granting religious accommodations to athletes.

Judge Maloney agreed with the student athletes that they presented enough facts and evidence to convince the court that they have a likelihood of prevailing on their First Amendment claims. Judge Maloney ruled:

Plaintiffs have established a likelihood of success on their claim that WMU’s denial of a religious exemption from vaccine requirement for its student athletes violates Plaintiffs’ right to the free exercise of religion. Defendants are enjoined from enforcing a COVID-19 vaccine requirement against Plaintiffs. Defendants may not prevent Plaintiffs from participating in team activities for the reason that Plaintiffs have not received a COVID-19 vaccine.

David A. Kallman, Senior Counsel with GLJC, stated, “Our clients are grateful that the Court has recognized they have a strong case for a religious exemption from this vaccine requirement. Our clients are thrilled that they can continue to be part of their soccer team, be with their teammates, and compete for WMU at the highest level in a safe manner.”

The Order granting the TRO is posted at the Great Lakes website at www.greatlakesjc.org/cases/dahl_v_wmu/.

The Great Lakes Justice Center is a non-profit organization dealing with First Amendment liberties and other civil rights issues. The attorneys at the center have spent countless hours to protect its client’s constitutional freedoms and are grateful to minister to such important causes. To support the Great Lakes Justice Center’s important work to protect our nation’s first freedoms, please visit them at www.greatlakesjc.org.

