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Contact: Janelle L. Davis
469-592-8775

Texas Senator's Law Firm Threatens Lawsuit Against Parents of Failing ISD for Speaking Out

Two parents from beleaguered Marlin ISD received a “cease and desist” letter from West & Associates, the law firm of Texas Senator Royce West (D-Dallas), just 10 days after reaching out to his Senate office for help. The letter threatens a defamation lawsuit if the parents do not muzzle their complaints about Marlin ISD and its Superintendent Darryl Henson. Sen. West sits on the Senate Education Committee.

Marlin ISD, located about 120 miles south of Dallas, has made state and national [headlines](#) over the past year due to controversy surrounding the district's postponement of graduation in 2023 and student grade and graduation requirement changes. Monica Johnson and Brandolyn Jones are graduates of Marlin ISD, and they now both have high-achieving children who were affected by the district's retroactive changes to its grading and class rank policies in May of 2023. The two mothers filed grievances related to Henson's actions. Those grievances were investigated by Henson who denied any wrongdoing. Johnson and Jones have also [shared](#) their experiences on social media and been vocal in public meetings. With the assistance of parental rights group [Texas Education 911](#), they have sought help from several state legislators.

In [The Path Forward](#) podcast last summer, Henson vigorously defended the district's actions, and decried the “small minority of parents who think with emotion over logic.” “It's their baby. It's boo,” he said, implying that complaining parents were defending their children's academic and attendance shortcomings as the district tried to hold them accountable. Instead, these parents say their children were prepared to graduate and that Henson improperly changed their grades and class rank after the school year ended. When they publicly spoke about these issues, they and their children were retaliated against. Johnson was wrongfully criminal trespassed from all Marlin ISD property for 1 year. When she filed a grievance, the trespass was lifted. Jones's husband received a call from the former Mayor of Marlin who told him that Henson was going to sue for defamation after Jones filed a complaint with the Texas Education Agency.

The “cease and desist” letter is yet another attempt by Marlin ISD and Henson to muzzle the parents' First Amendment right to free speech. The fact that it was sent by Sen. West's firm only adds to the parents' concerns. Because of his status as a member of the Senate Education Committee, Jones reached out to Sen. West's office for help. The last thing Jones expected in return was a letter threatening to sue her. With the help of parental rights attorney [Janelle L. Davis Law, PLLC](#), Johnson and Jones have now filed a federal civil rights lawsuit against Henson, the district, and the Marlin ISD chief of police. “Parents across the state simply want accountability from their school district when a mistake is made. Unfortunately, the actions of Marlin ISD and its Superintendent are what they typically receive instead – denial of wrongdoing, retaliation for speaking out, and then attempts to silence,” said Davis.

Marlin ISD has been under TEA management since 2017. Last year it claimed a B ranking and had its accreditation reinstated. The TEA recently announced plans to transition leadership back to Marlin ISD. Vocal parents like Johnson and Jones threaten the narrative that Henson's leadership has put the district on the right path.

The case is pending in the Western District of Texas, Case No. 6:24-cv-00108, *Johnson, et al. v. Henson, et al.* Relevant documents can be accessed [here](#).