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Monday, March 27, 2006

Contact:  
Beth Littrell or Gerry Weber, 404.523.6201

## ACLU SUES SCHOOL THAT EXPELLED STUDENT OVER A POEM

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Rome, GA - The American Civil Liberties Union of Georgia filed a federal lawsuit against Murray County Schools today on behalf of an eighth-grade student who was expelled last year because he wrote a poem about school violence.

The student was suspended, and ultimately expelled, after he showed a notebook full of poems to his English teacher. One of the poems, written in response to a documentary he watched suggesting terrorists were planning to attack American schools, was about violence visiting his school. Several students and another teacher read the poem without incident, all commenting on his creativity and none believing the poem to be threatening.

After the English teacher showed the poem to the School Resource Officer, the school suspended the 14 year-old indefinitely and required him to undergo psychological evaluation before the school would consider allowing him to return to school. Despite assurances from mental health professionals that he was not a danger to himself or others, school officials charged him with "acts of a threatening or violent nature." Based solely on the poem, the school barred him from attending *any* Murray County school for the remainder of the school year. School officials also filed an action against him in juvenile court claiming that he made criminal 'terroristic threats.'

"It is an outrage that this young man and his family have been put through the wringer - emotionally and financially - based on one harmless poem," said Beth Littrell, Associate Legal Director of the ACLU of Georgia. "Although he was cleared by the judge of any wrongdoing and cleared by the doctors of any harmful intent, he and his family have suffered, and will continue to suffer, as a result of overzealous school officials who equate zero tolerance policies with zero common sense," Littrell added.

The lawsuit seeks compensation, expungement of the student's records, and a change in policies that would ensure that no other student has to face what this family has endured based on the exercise of their freedom of speech.

"I do not want to see another creative child go through what my son has gone through," said the student's mother. "He showed a poem he wrote to his teacher because he was proud of it. Next thing you know, he's treated like a dangerous delinquent and deprived of the right to graduate with his eighth grade class. My wish is that no other child will ever have to endure the same burden that my son did just for expressing themselves creatively."

The student, identified only by his initials in court documents, remains upset about the schools unfair and shocking actions in response to a little poem.

“I feel as if I was cheated out of an education because I wrote a poem about something that you see and hear about on television all of the time,” said the student. “I never thought for a second that someone would think that I was a threat in any way. “

The experience has affected the young man’s ability to be creative.

“I have always loved writing and drawing and now I am afraid to write anything for fear that it will be taken wrong,” he said. “I feel I was treated unfairly all because I wrote a poem that deals with things that happen in society. Not writing about something will not make it go away.”

The lawsuit, J.U. v. Murray County School District et. al., is in the U.S. District Court for the Northern District of Georgia, and is available online at [www.acluga.org](http://www.acluga.org).

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The Poem (in its entirety):

“The Little Game”

Something bad is going to happen at school,  
Maybe to you, maybe to Loni,  
I’m not very sure, but I know it’ll haunt me.  
For the rest of my life, and for the rest of my days,  
all I will see is a red bloody haze.  
From Death to Desire,  
I have to find a heart that I truly admire.  
From blondes to brunets, reds and browns,  
their screams provide me a crisp, clean sound.  
I live in horror, terror and fear  
I feel like I must do something like Paul Reveare.  
I hear guns go off, bodies drop  
I just wish this little game would stop.  
Your heart beats, Your goin in shock,  
you reach for the glock but tha music stops...