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Vermont School District Pays \$147,500 to Settle Parent's First Amendment Violation Lawsuit

The Addison Rutland Supervisory Union (ARSU) has agreed to pay \$147,500 to settle a suit brought by the ACLU of Vermont. The suit was brought on behalf of a parent who was banned from school district property by school officials. The suit alleged this ban prevented the parent from communicating with school board members at board meetings, and thus violated his First Amendment speech rights.

The parent was served no-trespass orders after school officials said they feared for their safety because of the parent's size, loud voice, and harsh comments he made about his son's education. ACLU of Vermont executive director Allen Gilbert explained that this case sends the message to school districts that parents and members of the public can't be lightly denied access to open meetings. For ARSU Superintendent Ron Ryan, this was a safety issue, and the school placed safety first. Moving forward, Ryan will look to safety measures other than barring an individual, such as paying for a security guard at School Board meetings.

What You Need To Know

It is a high-bar to meet in order to ban speech in a public forum. If your school district is faced with a situation where it is considering banning a person from public meetings, consult with your attorney at Frost Brown Todd to evaluate potential First Amendment liability as well as alternative ways to resolve the situation.

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