



Written by [Michael Tennant](#) on September 21, 2020

Student Sues University Over Removal as Student Senate President for Expressing Catholic Beliefs

A Florida State University (FSU) student is [suing](#) the school after he was ousted as student senate president for expressing Catholic teachings in a private conversation with fellow Catholics.

Represented by the Alliance Defending Freedom, FSU senior Jack Denton is seeking reinstatement as student senate president, expungement of references to his removal as president from university records, and damages including \$846 of lost wages for what he claims are violations of his rights under the First and 14th Amendments as well as the Florida constitution and FSU and Student Government Association rules.



Denton, a Roman Catholic, was elected president of the student senate in the fall of 2019 after two years as a senator, suggesting that his colleagues held him in high regard.

On June 3, in a private group chat for the Catholic Student Union, one member posted a link to a YouTube video that was used to raise funds for several organizations.

In response, Denton wrote, “The various funds on that list are fine causes as far as I know, but everyone should be aware that BlackLivesMatter.com, Reclaim the Block, and the ACLU all advocate for things that are explicitly anti-Catholic.”

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Asked for clarification, he responded, “BlackLivesMatter.com fosters ‘a queer-affirming network’ and defends transgenderism. The ACLU defends laws protecting abortion facilities and sued states that restrict access to abortion. Reclaim the Block claims less police will make our communities safer and advocates for cutting PDs’ budgets. This is a little less explicit, but I think it’s contrary to the Church’s teaching on the common good.”

Denton explained his reason for making these facts known: “If I stay silent while my brothers and sisters may be supporting an organization that promotes grave evils, I have sinned through my silence.”

The person who posted the video took offense at Denton’s assertions and supplied screenshots of them to members of the student senate.

The same day, at a student senate meeting, Senator Kundhavi Gnanam offered a motion of no confidence in Denton, saying she was “offended and scandalized by the rhetoric that [he] used.” She made her motion, she said, because “people who have described me and my community as ‘grave evils’ have done it with the intention to not only hurt me emotionally but to hurt me physically.”

Despite supportive statements from some other senators, the motion failed. However, after two days of additional pressure, Denton called a special session to discuss the matter again. Once more, Gnanam



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made a no-confidence motion, and this time it passed overwhelmingly. One senator said Denton should be removed “despite his First Amendment right to free speech.” Another accused him of “a clear violation of separation of church and state.” And, of course, there were the usual accusations of racism and transphobia.

“I was shocked by ... the allegations and accusations that were thrown at me,” Denton told [LifeSiteNews](#), adding that “what is especially disappointing is to see so many people I considered friends and allies in the student senate ... turn their backs on me pretty quickly.”

Denton appealed to the student supreme court, which ignored his plea. The court had some vacancies, and the student senate took up nominations for temporary justices on July 8, violating its own rules by referring one nominee, Abby Salter, to the judiciary committee rather than having the entire senate consider her. According to the lawsuit, when the committee met on July 14, it “explicitly vetted Ms. Salter with Mr. Denton’s pending complaint to the Student Supreme Court in mind.” The senate adjourned for the summer without filling the vacancies, making it impossible for the court to hear Denton’s case.

Denton also repeatedly appealed to university administrators, but they either failed to respond or indicated they would not intervene.

Finally, he took the school and the student senate to federal court. The court is expected to rule September 29 on Denton’s request for a preliminary injunction to reinstate him as senate president and award him back pay.

“This wasn’t an attack just on my First Amendment right to freedom of speech or my First Amendment right to express my religious beliefs. It’s an attack on everyone’s,” Denton told LifeSiteNews.

“We as Americans have the right to express ourselves and express our religious beliefs. If we can’t express our religious beliefs, then the First Amendment doesn’t mean anything.”

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Michael Tennant is a freelance writer and regular contributor to The New American.



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