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PRESS STATEMENTS

DONNELL SCOTT

I am the mother of two Redwood Middle School students: Toni Kay, who is 14 and in the 8th grade, and Sydni, who is 11 and in the 6th grade. Both of my daughters are good students. They are also very active, curious and expressive kids. I encourage them to ask lots of questions and express themselves in discovering who they are.

For teenagers, clothes are an important part of that process. Sydni is involved with a youth group at church and likes to wear a concert T-shirt that says she is a "Jesus Freak." She should be able to show that identity in school, where she spends most of her day and where she is with her peers. If Toni Kay has an interest in politics and wants to wear a T-shirt with a message that supports Hillary Clinton or Arnold Schwarzenegger, she should be able to express her opinion that way. We should be encouraging kids to have an interest in politics, not killing that interest with an arbitrary dress code. And when my daughters want to wear something pretty, like a dress with pink trim, or something cute, like socks with a Winnie-the-Pooh character, they should be able to without feeling like they are doing something wrong.

That's why I'm challenging Redwood Middle School's dress code. Even though the school calls it a dress code, it's so restrictive that I think it's really a uniform policy. When I learned that state law requires schools to allow parents to exempt their kids from uniform policies, I wrote to Redwood Middle School, explaining that Toni Kay would not participate. The school ignored my letter, and the letters of other parents who tried to opt out. After the ACLU of Northern California wrote a letter to the school district, they opened up the policy for community comment. I was the only parent opposed to the policy allowed to participate on a committee set up to review the dress code. Throughout that process I asked why patterns, colors, pictures and words on clothing would create a safety problem on campus. I never got a convincing answer.

The school has not shown that wearing pinstripes or floral patterns or the color pink is a safety issue. Instead they discipline kids for trying to express any individual style or thought through their clothing, especially kids like mine, whose families have spoken up against the dress code. It is unfair that their dress code violations could be a part of the record that follows them to high school or college. It gives the impression they were doing something wrong, when they were only trying to be themselves. How you dress is an important way kids express their individuality, and the school has taken that away.

TONI KAY SCOTT

I am an 8th grader at Redwood Middle School. I think it is important that kids be able to show who they are through how they dress. You can do that by having a certain style, or by wearing clothes that show your opinion or your sense of humor. Everyone's different and no one wants to just blend into the crowd and be like everyone else. The dress code makes it hard for us to say anything about ourselves. We waste a lot of time and money trying to find clothes that won't violate the dress code and the teachers waste a lot of time checking to see if we are wearing the right clothes instead of just teaching us. Sometimes the school makes kids wear gym clothes when they get cited for a dress code violation. It's embarrassing and it distracts us from things that are more important, like learning. Kids who want to express their opinions through their clothes or have their own style aren't hurting anyone. That's why I'm working with my parents and the ACLU to try to change the dress code.

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