

Jury Finds Waterford Public Schools Retaliated Against Whistleblower Teacher for Reporting Threat of School Gun Violence

Southfield, Michigan – As a special education teacher at Waterford Public Schools’ Riverside Elementary, Katherine Albright reasonably expected the school district to appropriately address her report about a disturbing threat of gun violence. Instead, a jury found that the school district unlawfully retaliated against her, ending her employment just 11 days after she reported a school shooting threat made by one of her students.

According to a lawsuit filed in May 2023 against Waterford Public Schools, one of Ms. Albright’s students handed her a disturbing and threatening drawing depicting the student shooting Ms. Albright with a handgun. The student also made chilling threats, “kill teacher,” “I hurt teacher,” and “I want to hurt you in your head and your heart.”

For her own protection and the safety of the entire school, court documents show Ms. Albright immediately informed Riverside Elementary’s principal of these alarming threats. Following her report, the plaintiff urged the school’s administration to implement safety measures, such as checking the student’s backpack at pick up and drop off, to make sure the student did not act on the vivid school shooting threat.

Despite her persistent efforts to safeguard students, faculty, staff, and the community, Ms. Albright alleged the school district refused to address her concerns. Eleven days after the plaintiff made her initial report, she says the district delivered her an ultimatum: either resign your position or be terminated. Left with no practical option, Ms. Albright had no choice but to resign.

After over a year of litigation, the case went to trial. On September 20, 2024, after three and one-half days of testimony and evidence, an Oakland County Circuit Court jury found that Waterford Public Schools violated the Michigan Whistleblowers’ Protection Act by retaliating against Ms. Albright for filing her report of the threat of school gun violence. The jury awarded Ms. Albright \$134,090.55 in damages, including compensation for lost wages and benefits, and damage to her career, professional reputation, and professional esteem.

“We are grateful to the jury for delivering justice for our client,” said attorney Tad T. Roumayah of Sommers Schwartz, P.C., who represents Ms. Albright. “It is outrageous that Waterford Public Schools – just 20 miles from Oxford High where a student killed four students and injured seven – blatantly punished a teacher for reporting a disturbing threat of school gun violence made by one of her students. The jury’s verdict sent a clear message that school districts will face legal consequences if they choose to retaliate against teachers and staff who sound the alarm on school safety threats.”

CASE INFORMATION

Michigan Circuit Court County of Oakland

Albright v. Waterford School District

Case No. 23-200322-CD

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