

The *Barbieri* Case

Case Name: *Barbieri v. Jeitschko*

Case Status: Complaint filed in the Western District Court of Michigan Southern Division on May 18, 2023.

Significance: Whether public university professors may forcibly extract money from students in support of political organizations.



Background: Nathan Barbieri and Nolan Radomski are students at Michigan State University. Amy Wisner, a marketing professor at Michigan State University, forced Nathan, Nolan, and thousands of other students to buy a membership for an organization, “The Rebellion Community,” whose funds went to Planned Parenthood and other organizations. The Rebellion Community’s website clearly stated that Professor Wisner “does not receive any financial compensation from your membership fees,” but in fact she controlled the group. She also used its funds for her own political activism and to donate to other groups that promote messages and activities that violate Nathan and Nolan’s sincerely held religious beliefs. Professor Wisner used the authority she had under MSU policies to order each of her students to pay a \$99 membership fee to join the outside organization, forcing them to subsidize political speech. Professors cannot compel students to participate in speech that violates their convictions, nor can they force students to monetarily support activist political organizations. Professor Wisner broke those rules and was dishonest as she did it. ADF has filed suit against Professor Wisner and other MSU officials for violating the First Amendment by forcing students to support causes with which they disagree.

Key Points

- Professors cannot forcibly collect funds for their own political activism from their students.
- Public universities must be held accountable when professors use their authority to force students to financially support causes they disagree with.
- Students should be free to obtain an education without being compelled to support speech or groups that promote a message in opposition to their personal beliefs.
- The First Amendment prohibits government-funded institutions from forcing individuals to financially support causes that are antithetical to their deeply held beliefs.

Key Facts

- Professor Wisner disregarded her students’ rights and used her power as their professor to make them finance her preferred political causes.
- Professor Wisner bragged on social media that the fees she was forcing her students to pay were supporting political causes, including Planned Parenthood.

The Bottom Line: Professors can’t force students to fund political organizations as a requirement for an academic course.