



Governor

Legislature

Local

National

Hollywood

Opinion



Home > Articles >

School Aid Wins Free Speech Lawsuit Against San Gabriel School District

School Aid Wins Free Speech Lawsuit Against San Gabriel School District

The lawsuit also alleged illegal religious discrimination under federal and California law

By [Evan Gahr](#), October 29, 2025 4:43 pm

GET A WEEKLY SUMMARY OF CALIFORNIA GLOBE STORIES:

email address

Subscribe

FOLLOW US





School aide Alyssa Esquivel. (Photo: Advocates for Faith and Freedom)

School aide Alyssa Esquivel fought back against Trump derangement syndrome—and won.

The San Gabriel Unified School District has agreed to pay Esquivel money to settle the free speech lawsuit she filed last year after being hounded out of her job as a sign language interpreter for bringing a Trump-themed knapsack and water bottle to work.

In addition to the monetary payment, the District is voiding the record of her termination and paying the fees for her attorneys at the Murrieta-based **Advocates for Faith and Freedom**.

Esquivel has since moved on to a job with a different school district.

Advocates for Faith and Freedom lawyer Julianne Fleischer told the California Globe that, "This is an excellent victory for free speech and given today's climate concerning conservative voices, Alyssa's rights were violated and now she was 'vindicated.'"

She added that the settlement "shows an employee can not be disciplined for conservative values. It is a victory for Alyssa and individuals who seek to go to work and not hide their values. A school district would not settle if they didn't think there was some wrongdoing on their part. [This] sends a powerful message that employees can't be bullied into silence."

Fleischer declined to specify how much money the District is paying Esquivel.

The **lawsuit was filed** on July 26, 2024 in the United States District Court for the Central District of California. In addition to First Amendment violations, the lawsuit also alleged illegal religious discrimination under federal and California law because school officials targeted her for reading religious books on her break, and then clamped down even more after other workers complained about her Trump apparel.

Esquivel **previously told the California Globe** that she was "shocked" her co-workers fixated on her Trump items at the expense of students. "I was very upset that I was being singled out for showing support for my country."

Esquivel had been working as a sign language interpreter for the San Gabriel Unified School District since 2022, and always received good performance reviews.

The problems started in June 2023 when her co-workers at **Del Mar High School** started complaining about the religious books she was reading on her own time. According to the lawsuit, "Multiple District employees made disparaging remarks regarding Ms. Esquivel's Christian faith. One District employee told her to "tone" down her "faith beliefs."

Additionally, the school principal "told her to put her religious books away while she was reading them on a work break."

Soon after that rebuke, other school aides started carping at Esquivel about her water bottle with a sticker of Trump's face on it. But none of the students took offense.

On June 15, classroom aide Eugenia Dana, who had been insulting Esquivel, "moved Ms. Esquivel's water bottle (which sported several stickers depicting presidents, including one of former-President Trump) to a location out of Ms. Esquivel's reach."

When Esquivel objected, Dana told her in front of students to “shut up.”

Dana said she “didn’t want Trump looking at [her],” a sentiment another classroom aide, Jennifer Drake, echoed when Ms. Drake added, “I asked you [Ms. Esquivel] not to bring in that Trump stuff.”

The next day, Dana threw a temper tantrum and flipped over the classroom desk, shared by aides, where Esquivel kept her water bottle.

Throwing files around, Dana also shrieked that Esquivel was “not going to put it [the water bottle] on my desk and taunt me with him [Donald Trump].”

Dana was not disciplined for her antics. But the hammer soon came down on Esquivel.

On July 5, “Principal [Muhammad] Abdul-Qawi directed Ms. Esquivel not to display her Trump-themed backpack and water bottle in public. This was in reference to Ms. Esquivel’s souvenir backpack that bore “T-R-U-M-P” lettering over an American flag background.”

But after consulting with lawyers, Esquivel remained defiant.

“Esquivel continued to bring her Trump-themed water bottle and backpack with her to school campus believing she had a First Amendment right to do so.”

She was initially placed on paid administrative leave, then suspended and finally fired for insubordination in June 2024.

Officials said she was violating the District regulation that prohibits employees from wearing “buttons or articles of clothing that express political opinions on ballot measures or candidates during instructional time.”

But the lawsuit says she was not using the knapsack or water bottle as part of her official duties so the regulation should not apply and its enforcement infringed on her First Amendment right to privately express opinions.

The distinction is important because it is established case law that the speech of government employees can be limited if it occurs while they are doing their job.

“Ms. Esquivel had no official duty to utilize a Trump-themed water bottle or backpack, and neither were required to perform her job. The District did not issue or pay for Ms. Esquivel’s backpack and water bottle,” the complaint says.

“The District’s directive that Ms. Esquivel not bring her Trump-themed backpack and water bottle to campus or otherwise display these items censored Ms.

Esquivel's speech by prohibiting her from speaking on matters of public concern as a private citizen. "

Esquivel said in a statement about the lawsuit settlement that, "First and foremost, I give all honor and glory to God. I am grateful to Advocates for Faith & Freedom for being a voice for justice. I stood firm because my faith and convictions are worth more than a paycheck, and I hope my case inspires others facing similar violations of their rights to take a bold stand."

San Gabriel Unified School District Jim Symonds did not reply to repeated requests for comment.

Author Recent Posts



Evan Gahr

Evan Gahr was the Washington Gadfly columnist for the Daily Caller and press critic for New York Post editorial page editor Eric Breindel.

Spread the news:



RELATED ARTICLES



San Diego School District Ends Mandatory School Masking Plans

📅 August 18, 2022



San Diego School District Doubles Down on Mask Mandates

📅 July 20, 2022



San Diego School District Drops Indoor Mask Mandate

📅 April 4, 2022

🔖 Tagged Advocates for Faith and Freedom, Alyssa Esquivel, Del Mar High School, lawyer Julianne Fleischer, San Gabriel Unified School District

2 thoughts on “School Aid Wins Free Speech Lawsuit Against San Gabriel School District”



Showandtell

October 29, 2025 at 5:25 pm

Great news! I love it.

Reply



Sandra Bernbaum

October 31, 2025 at 9:52 pm

And we wonder why our kids coming out of high school are moral morons.

Reply

Leave a Reply

Your email address will not be published. Required fields are marked *

Comment *

Name *

Email *

Website

I'm not a robot
reCAPTCHA is changing its terms of service.
[Take action.](#)reCAPTCHA
[Privacy](#) - [Terms](#)

Post Comment

EDITOR: KATY GRIMES, KATY@CALIFORNIAGLOBE.COM
REPORTER: EVAN SYMON, EVAN@CALIFORNIAGLOBE.COM



ABOUT US
TERMS & CONDITIONS
PRIVACY POLICY
ADVERTISE WITH US