



On October 29, 2024, Texas Appleseed filed a complaint with the U.S. Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights against the Beaumont ISD Police Department for engaging in routine discipline and using excessive force against a Black student in violation of Titles IV and VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, §37.081(d-2) of the Texas Education Code, and the Beaumont ISD Police Department Manual. On April 30, 2024, Officer Holland of the Beaumont ISD Police pepper-sprayed a 17-year-old Black student, referred to here as Amber (a pseudonym), after grabbing her by the hair and forcefully kneeling her in the face during the aftermath of a campus altercation, escalating the situation and causing severe physical and emotional harm. After the incident, the student faced disproportionate punishment, including three days of out-of-school suspension, in-school suspension, and nearly a month at a Disciplinary Alternative Education Program (DAEP). The student also completed 30 hours of community service over the summer to return to her home campus, all while dealing with the lingering trauma from the incident.

Officer Holland's actions reflect a failure by Beaumont ISD and its police department to adhere to Title IV and Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 by discriminating against the student involved in this incident and other Black students and disproportionately subjecting them to law enforcement referrals. Officer Holland's conduct violated clearly established legal precedent, including *Curran v. Aleshire*, which prohibits the use of excessive force against individuals who are not resisting, attempting to escape, or posing a threat. Furthermore, Texas Education Code §37.081(d-2), which restricts police involvement in routine disciplinary matters, was ignored. The use of force in this matter also contravened Beaumont ISD's own policy manual, which requires officers to act reasonably and prohibits disciplinary techniques that impair a student's breathing or senses, such as the use of pepper spray. These failures demonstrate a systemic disregard for the rights and well-being of students, particularly Black students like the one involved in this case.

This incident, however, is not a singular situation as two other Black male students were also pepper sprayed by another Beaumont ISD Police Officer during an altercation in October. This encounter and the one with Officer Holland are indicative of broader patterns of racial discrimination within Beaumont ISD and Texas schools more broadly. Data from the district reveals that Black students accounted for 75% of law enforcement referrals in the 2020-21 school year, despite comprising only 59.6% of enrollment, while White students received none. Statewide, during the 2023-24 academic year, Black students, who represented 12.8% of public school enrollment, accounted for 21.62% of DAEP placements, a stark disparity compared to White students. These statistics highlight the harmful relationship between school policing, exclusionary discipline, and systemic racism, which all disproportionately burden Black students and fuel the school-to-prison pipeline.

The excessive force used by Officer Holland underscores the urgent need for reform. Her actions breached district policies and reflected the systemic failures of the Beaumont ISD Police Department to comply with established laws and guidelines. The district's reliance on punitive measures rather than restorative justice exacerbates these harms, pushing students, especially Black students, out of their educational environments and further marginalizing them. This incident demands accountability from the district and its police department, as well as enforcement of civil rights protections by the U.S. Department of Education. Accordingly, Texas Appleseed filed its complaint in an effort to call attention to this injustice, with the ultimate goal of achieving better educational outcomes for Black children and other historically underserved young Texans.