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Attorneys and Advocates Organize Response to Schools that Punish Students who Participate in Gun Violence Awareness Walkouts

ALPINE, Texas — A corps of more than 40 attorneys and advocates across Texas have joined forces to protect students who participate in walkouts and protests against gun violence. Since these protests began, following the horrific shooting in Parkland, Florida, students and parents in several districts across Texas have reported that campus and district administrators have threatened to punish students who protest with suspensions, alternative school placements, taking away extracurricular activities, and even arrests.

Students in Alpine Independent School District are attempting to coordinate a peaceful school walkout as part of National School Walkout Day on April 20. Several students contacted the network of attorneys and advocates for assistance — they reported that the Alpine High School Principal told protest organizers that all student protesters would receive at least three days of placement in the District's Disciplinary Alternative Education Program (DAEP) if they walked out of class. Further, the students reported that they were told that they would be removed from extracurricular activities, including the National Honor Society. The students reported that, in a meeting with students, the Alpine ISD Superintendent confirmed that the Principal had the right to enforce the punishments described.

In addition to expressing their ideas about gun laws and its effect on schools and participating with classmates across the nation on an identified day, the Alpine students expressed very personal reasons for wanting to peacefully walk out of their school — many experienced a school shooting in 2016 and are still grappling with the trauma they lived through that day.

The school administrator responses that Alpine ISD students have reported are different from those of administrators in other school districts in Texas, many of whom have chosen to support student protestors instead of punishing them. Austin ISD, for example, issued [this statement and Frequently Asked Questions tool](#), which urges students to safely express their views.

Steven Gilmore, a San Antonio attorney who first began gathering attorneys and advocates to support student protesters says, "It is unconscionable to threaten students with punishment that is intended to discourage them from engaging in political participation, or to discriminate against their political views. The Constitution does not permit administrators to engage in disparate treatment of students based on the political content of their speech."

(more)

“Every day students across Texas are punished with harmful exclusionary discipline practices, like suspensions and alternative school placements,” says Morgan Craven, director of Texas Appleseed’s School-to-Prison Pipeline Project. “We want to make sure that no student, including those that are simply exercising their right to participate in peaceful protests, is punished unfairly.”

Resources for students, including Know Your Rights materials and a letter to school administrators that outlines Constitutional protections of student speech and the prohibitions on blanket, overly-punitive responses to political expression, are available at <http://texasappleseed.org/protecting-students-who-protest>. The site also has information for students who are punished and need assistance and for attorneys and advocates who want to participate in the effort to protect student protestors.

About Texas Appleseed

Texas Appleseed is a public interest justice center that works to change unjust laws and policies that prevent Texans from realizing their full potential. Our nonprofit conducts data-driven research that uncovers inequity in laws and policies and identifies solutions for lasting, concrete change. For more information, visit www.TexasAppleseed.org.

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