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August 21, 2008

Ms. Bridget Williams
Superintendent
Mountain Grove R-III School District
207 East 5th
P. O. Box 806
Mtn. Grove, Missouri 65711

By FASCIMILE (417) 926-3177 and FedEx

Re: Amelia Robbins

Dear Ms. Williams:

I am writing on behalf of Amelia Robbins, a student at Mountain Grove Middle School, and her family.

It is our understanding that Amelia has been suspended—and will remain indefinitely suspended—from Mountain Grove Middle School because she has colored her hair. Amelia has dyed her hair a light shade of pink to express honor for her father, who died of cancer. The color is subtle. Here is a picture:



Students do not shed their constitutional rights at the schoolhouse door. The student speech at issue in this case is “pure student speech.” It is analogous to the black armbands worn by students protesting the military action Vietnam in *Tinker v. Des Moines Ind. Community Sch. Dist.*, 393 U.S. 503 (1969). Amelia has a particularized message that she is attempting to convey. The message is likely to be understood. This expression combines with the school’s vague policy on appearance to make this case very different than those in which schools had a clear and uniform dress code policy that some students simply disliked.

Student speech must be tolerated by schools “unless school authorities have reason to believe that such expression will ‘substantially interfere with the work of the school or impinge upon the rights of other students.’” *Hazelwood Sch. Dist. v. Kuhlmeier*, 484 U.S. 260 (1988)(quoting *Tinker*, 393 U.S. at 509). The circumstances present in this case do not approach those where any reasonable school official could find that the work of the school or the rights of other students is substantially impacted.

Time is of the essence in resolving these matters since Amelia is missing valuable days in the classroom, and it is the responsibility of school officials to protect students’ constitutional right to exercise free speech in a peaceful manner. Accordingly, please notify us in writing by 3 p.m. tomorrow that the school district will (a) cease and desist any disciplinary action toward Amelia for her pink hair; (b) allow Amelia’s immediate return to school without any changes in her hair color; (c) expunge the suspension from Amelia’s record; and (d) allow Amelia to make up any work she missed as a result of her suspension.

If we do not receive a satisfactory response, then we will advise Amelia and her family as to their legal options.

Sincerely,



Anthony E. Rothert
Legal Director

* * * Communication Result Report (Aug. 21. 2008 12:33PM) * * *

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Date/Time: Aug. 21. 2008 12:32PM

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M. 1) Hang up or line fail	E. 2) Busy
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DATE: 8-21-08
 TO: Bridger Williams FAX NUMBER: 417-926-3172
 FROM: Tony Rothman PHONE NUMBER:
 RE: # OF PAGES (INCLUDING COVER): 3