

April 14, 2022

Last Wednesday I was informed that Carondelet was participating in a Day of Silence. I inquired what this was about and did my own research. My daughter did not want to participate and felt like she would be called homophobic if she went to school without “the badge”. We told her to attend school, she has a right to an education as much as every other girl, and to call us if she was not receiving instruction that day.

Around 10:00 am my daughter called me, in hushed tones, that she was supposed to be in History class but her teacher, Mrs. Cozzone, wasn't talking. She said Mrs. Cozzone was participating in the Day of Silence. The girls were to watch a google slideshow on the Day of Silence, watch a TED Talk on a Lesbian's story of “coming out”, a TED Talk on the Day of Silence, respond to an article titled “Florida's law limiting LGBTQ discussion in schools, explained” and to complete an “exit ticket” that asked the students to answer questions about the Day of Silence. At this time, my husband went to the Main Office to pick up our daughter. He shared his concerns and received blank stares. There was no administrative reaction to show they cared about the concerns of a parent.

In researching the Day of Silence, I looked at GLSEN's website, as that was the organization mentioned on Carondelet's DEI Instagram. According to GLSEN, The National Day of Silence is on April 22, 2022 (Not April 8, 2022). They list ways to prepare for the Day of Silence and state this is a **student led** silent protest.

My understanding after reviewing the announcements sent by the school, hearing my daughter's explanation of what was said in morning announcements, and reading Mrs. Cozzone's class agenda and assignments for the day, that this was not in fact “student led”. This was led and encouraged by the school and infused into the classrooms. I looked into the idea that this may have been led by the Horizon Club, however only found information on the DEI Instagram leading me to believe that this was put on by the DEI Council which is not a student led club. Rather a school led leadership council.

My main concern is that Mrs. Cozzone brought this protest into the classroom. According to Lambda Legal on the GLSEN website, those who would like to participate in a silent protest, such as the Day of Silence, have a legal right to do so. “The right to speak includes the right not to speak, as well as the right to wear buttons or T-shirts expressing support for a cause”. Also, “If a teacher tells a student to answer a question during class, the student generally doesn't have a constitutional right to refuse to answer”. <https://www.glsen.org/blog/faq-sheet-lambda-legal-freedom-speak-or-not>

This right of speech applies to all students. In Mrs. Cozzone's classroom on April 8, the students who were not participating in the Day of Silence were forced to be silent thus participate in the protest. They did not get to exercise their right to speak. They were also forced to participate through assignments that were exclusively related to the silent protest they found themselves in the middle of.

Our family sacrifices financially to send our daughter to Carondelet. Our intention was to help her continue her Catholic Education. We've found Carondelet to be a very good Private School. We have had a few complaints in the past we chose not to write to you about, however when we see an individual teacher's political opinion being forced on the students in the classroom and taking up the entire 85 minute block of class time, we needed to share our concern.

Respectfully,