

Federal court rules that transgender students must be allowed to use bathrooms that match their gender

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By Li Cohen

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A federal court in Florida has ruled that it is unconstitutional for schools to ban transgender students from using the restroom that matches their gender identity. Judges of the U.S. Court of Appeals for the 11th Circuit announced on Friday that they are affirming a lower court's ruling on the matter because "a public school may not punish its students for gender conformity."

The case was centered around Drew Adams, a 19-year-old former student of Allen D. Nease High School in Ponte Vedra, Florida. Adams, who is transgender, used the boys' restroom at Nease High School, and did so without any issues until an anonymous report was made, according to [Lambda Legal](#). After the report, he was told by school officials that he would only be allowed to use gender-neutral restrooms.

Adams worked with Lambda Legal to sue the school board in June 2017. The U.S. District Court for the Middle District of Florida, a federal court in Jacksonville, ruled in Adams favor in 2018, but Adams' school board appealed the decision last year.

"The School Board's bathroom policy, as applied to Mr. Adams, singled him out for different treatment because of his transgender status," the judges ruled on Friday. "A public school may not punish its students for gender nonconformity. Neither may a public school harm transgender students by establishing arbitrary, separate rules for their restroom use. The evidence at trial confirms that Mr. Adams suffered both these indignities."

The judges said that the schools board did not uphold the 14th Amendment, which guarantees equal rights, and Title IX, which bans sex discrimination in education.

CBS News reached out to the St. Johns County School District for comment. The district has not yet responded.

According to Lambda Legal, this case was the first in the country to go to trial about a transgender student's right to equal access to restrooms.

Tara Borelli, an attorney at Lambda Legal, said that the court's affirmation sent a clear message "that schools must treat transgender students with the same dignity and respect as any other student."

"The trial court was correct when it ruled that the law requires that Drew Adams be treated like every other boy and be allowed to use the boys' restroom," Borelli said. "We are glad the court saw the school board's policy as unjust and discriminatory, and affirmed the inherent dignity and worth of transgender students."

Adams said he's happy to see justice prevail "after spending almost my entire high school career

fighting for equal treatment."

"High school is hard enough without having your school separate you from your peers and mark you as inferior," Adams said. "I hope this decision helps save other transgender students from having to go through that painful and humiliating experience."

In 2016, then-President Obama mandated that public schools allow transgender students to use the restrooms that align with their gender identity. After taking office in 2017, President Trump [rescinded those orders](#).