



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
July 25, 2024

## **Defending the Right to Free Speech: The Liberty Justice Center Sues Oregon School District for Firing Track Coach Who Spoke out on Rules for Transgender Athletes**

**Austin, TX**—The Liberty Justice Center has filed a First Amendment lawsuit against an Oregon school district on behalf of a high school track and field coach who was fired for proposing an open division for transgender athletes to compete in, to ensure fairness for all student athletes.

Oregon track and field coach John Parks has trained athletes at the high school, collegiate, and Olympic levels for over four decades. This June, however, the Lake Oswego School District and the Lake Oswego School Board fired him from his position as head track and field coach for writing a letter in which he proposed an open division for transgender athletes in the upcoming track and field state championship.

In Oregon, the governing body that regulates high school athletics currently allows student athletes to compete in the division of their asserted gender identity. But its policies conflict with international rules of competition—in March 2023, the World Athletics Council [ruled](#) that transgender athletes who have gone through male puberty may not participate in women’s international events. As a result, transgender student athletes in Oregon who race in girls’ divisions can no longer advance to international competitions, nor can any biological females they outrace.

In August 2023, World Aquatics—the governing body for international swimming events—created an [open division](#) in which “all sex and gender identities” are free to compete.

In May 2024, Coach Parks wrote a letter to the Oregon School Activities Association (OSAA) suggesting that Oregon adopt a similar open division, bringing Oregon into alignment with international rules of competition.

In this letter, Coach Parks shared his personal opinion that the OSAA’s current policies place excessive pressure and national media attention on transgender student athletes. He advocated for an open division as a place where transgender athletes could compete without facing harassment and where their athletic achievements could be celebrated. Coach Parks’ letter also shared his opinion that the OSAA’s current policies are unfair to female student athletes. He proposed that an open division would protect female athletes’ opportunities for success by allowing them the chance to advance to international competitions without having to compete against individuals with innate biological and physical advantages over them.

In response to his letter, an OSAA official contacted the Lake Oswego School District on May 23 and falsely accused Coach Parks of discriminating against and harassing transgender athletes at recent track meets. The District fired Coach Parks on June 12, claiming it was because he had

violated the District's harassment policy. The District denied his request for an appeal and ignored his rejection of the OSAA official's false accusations.

On July 25, the Liberty Justice Center filed a lawsuit against the Lake Oswego School District and the Lake Oswego School Board on Coach Parks' behalf, arguing that the District and Board fired him in retaliation for writing the letter and thereby violated his constitutional rights to free speech and to due process. The lawsuit urges the court to restore his coaching position and to uphold his First Amendment and Fourteenth Amendment rights.

"Coach Parks was retaliated against, falsely accused of discriminatory behavior, denied an appeal, and fired—just for exercising his constitutional right to free speech as a private citizen," said Buck Dougherty, Senior Counsel at the Liberty Justice Center. "We are proud to stand up for his constitutional rights through this lawsuit, and we look forward to holding the District and the Board accountable for this egregious violation of free speech and due process."

"I'm a staunch defender of transgender rights. For decades, I've been a voice for equitable and inclusive treatment for students with a wide variety of gender and sexual identities, on the track and in the classroom," said Coach John Parks, plaintiff in the lawsuit. "And I've seen that these athletic controversies are drawing negative attention to the trans community. Trans athletes have a right to compete, but their bodies have major physical advantages over other students. Oregon's current policies subject these kids to so much politicization, and that's a failure by the administration. We have to find a better way to allow all student athletes to compete. For that to happen, we need these matters discussed, not silenced."

*Parks v. Lake Oswego School District* was filed in the U.S. District Court for the District of Oregon, Portland Division, on July 25, 2024. Salem, Oregon-based attorney Luke Miller served as local counsel for the submission to the Court.

The Liberty Justice Center's legal filings in *Parks v. Lake Oswego School District* are available [here](#).

###

**The Liberty Justice Center** is a nonprofit, public-interest litigation center that fights to protect fundamental constitutional rights. The Liberty Justice Center is best known for its 2018 U.S. Supreme Court victory in *Janus v. AFSCME*. Learn more about the Liberty Justice Center at [LibertyJusticeCenter.org](https://LibertyJusticeCenter.org).