$3M HIV Discrimination Lawsuit Filed Against Morehouse College

A student claims Atlanta's Morehouse College did not accept him into an academic program because he has HIV.

March 23, 2021 By Trent Straube

A former student at Morehouse College in Atlanta filed an HIV discrimination lawsuit against the historically Black men's liberal arts school seeking over $3 million in emotional distress damages, reports The Atlanta Journal-Constitution.

The student, who remains anonymous and graduated in May 2020, claims that he disclosed his HIV-positive status in his application essay to the school's Cinema, Television and Emerging Media Studies program. According to the lawsuit, a faculty member said the program was too demanding for a student with a health issue such as HIV. As a result, the student was not admitted into the program.

The college did not offer a comment to the Atlanta Journal-Constitution because, the school said, it doesn't discuss pending legal cases.

Although the student graduated last spring, his lawyer pointed out that the student was not able to complete the program of his choice. What's more, the student "suffered emotional distress, increased anxiety and mental anguish, as a result of being discriminated against because of his HIV status by an alma mater that was once beloved," his lawyer wrote in the complaint, according to the newspaper. "The plaintiff revealed his innermost secret to the defendant and the defendant unlawfully used it against him."

In addition to the $3 million, the lawsuit seeks $81,000 in compensation and asks that the college set up an appeals process for students denied entry to the school's film, TV and media program.

Morehouse College is a private institution that accepts federal funding. In the United States, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) prohibits public entities from discriminating against people who have disabilities, including HIV. The Department of Labor and the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission help enforce and investigate claims involving the Americans with Disabilities Act. To learn more about the ADA, call the ADA information line at 800-514-0301 or 800-514-0383, or visit ADA.gov.

See our POZ cover story “Defying Discrimination” (pictured above) about taking action against stigma and discrimination. It includes tips on filing an HIV lawsuit. In related news, see the recent

article “The 12 Most Common Types of HIV Discrimination Complaints” about the LGBT and HIV advocacy group Lambda Legal, and find a collection of related content in POZ by clicking #Discrimination.

Did you know that in 2019, African Americans represented 13% of the U.S. population but 43% of new HIV cases? In the South, they accounted for 52% of HIV diagnoses. You can learn more about HIV among African Americans—and several other minority populations—by visiting the HIV/AIDS Basics on POZ.com and clicking on the “HIV in Specific Populations” section. And check out the information in the write-up for 2021’s National Black HIV/AIDS Awareness Day (#NBHAAD).

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