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Southeastern Legal Foundation Files Suit Against University of New Mexico over Unconstitutional Security Fees Following Riley Gaines Event

SLF files lawsuit challenging UNM's discriminatory actions against conservative students and speakers

ALBUQUERQUE, NM (Feb. 27, 2024): [Southeastern Legal Foundation \(SLF\)](#) filed a [federal lawsuit](#) against the University of New Mexico (UNM) after the university attempted to charge a conservative student organization over \$5,000 in security fees for hosting speaker [Riley Gaines](#). The Turning Point USA chapter at UNM invited Ms. Gaines, a former Division I athlete who competed against transgender-identifying swimmer Lia Thomas, to share her views about competing in women's sports and preserving biological eligibility requirements. But when UNM found out about the event, it told the students that if they wanted to hold the event they would have to first pay a security fee and provided an initial quote of over \$10,000. Rather than meet its duty to staff security with money from its multi-million dollar endowment, to protect the students, and to remove any potential hecklers from the crowd, UNM instead imposed a hefty fee on the students that they surely would not be able to afford.

SLF [warned](#) the university prior to the event that it violates the First Amendment to impose security fees or costs based on how a university thinks people will react to a person's speech. To do so allows officials to make judgments based on speakers' viewpoints, which is never constitutional. Despite SLF's letter, the university disregarded the warning and sent the students an invoice after the event totaling \$5,384.75. The invoice showed that twenty-seven officers were on-site, with several officers roaming and even an "arrest team" standing by, even though the event was peaceful and only a few protestors showed up holding signs. UNM also admitted that the university consistently applies higher fees to Turning Point USA events. Notably, Turning Point USA is the only remaining conservative student organization left on UNM's campus.

SLF filed a [lawsuit](#) on behalf of the student chapter and the [Leadership Institute](#), a nonprofit organization that aids student organizations with planning and funding these events.

Director of SLF's Legal Initiatives [Cece O'Leary](#) states, "Turning Point USA is the only conservative group left on UNM's campus, and it is no wonder. When students have to pay thousands of dollars every time they want to engage in basic speech activities—the very thing they are supposed to be doing during their college years—eventually they stop speaking and assembling altogether."

SLF Executive Director [Kimberly Hermann](#) states, "Students want to have conversations about challenging topics, from biology and transgenderism, to the upcoming election, to conflicts overseas. But when universities don't like the students' viewpoint or position on those issues, they all too often silence them and reward the aggressors who threaten and even assault students and their invited guests. The First Amendment demands more from universities, and we are holding UNM accountable in court."