

## **Southeastern Legal Foundation Issues Formal Warning to Valdosta State University over Free Speech Zone**

VALDOSTA, GA (March 12, 2024): [Southeastern Legal Foundation](#) (SLF) sent a [legal demand letter](#) to Valdosta State University warning it that it may be violating state and federal law for maintaining a campus “free speech zone.”

A student at Valdosta invited a field representative from [Young Americans for Liberty](#) (YAL) to help him recruit students to start a YAL chapter by setting up an informational table in an open, outdoor area of campus. But a university administrator ordered them to move to the campus “free speech zone”—a tiny, out-of-the-way area obscured by bushes and trees that is only open for a small part of the week—because they were not a registered student organization. Moving to the speech zone made it much harder for the YAL members to recruit other students to join their organization, and they were unable to secure enough signatures to form a campus chapter.

SLF warned the university that its actions may have violated Georgia law and the First Amendment. It explained in its [letter](#) to the university that college is the “marketplace of ideas,” but VSU has undermined this basic principle by relegating its own students and their invited guests to a cramped, out-of-sight speech zone. Moreover, Georgia law expressly states that students and their invited guests may gather spontaneously to engage in speech in any open, outdoor area of a public campus.

Vice President of Litigation for SLF [Braden Boucek](#) explains, “As a Georgia university, Valdosta is bound by Georgia law. And the law makes it clear that a university must respect the freedom to gather in outdoor areas without being forced into faraway speech zones. This freedom clearly extends to invited speakers too, and this makes sense because students should be using all the resources available to them to engage in speech and start clubs based on their interests during their four years on campus.”

Director of Legal Initiatives for SLF [Cece O’Leary](#) adds, “College is meant to be a time when students are exposed to true diversity of thought. Universities should encourage open and spontaneous expression, especially when it involves basic activities like tabling and recruiting members to join a club. Valdosta is regulating speech to the point of silencing it, and it must reverse course.”

SLF will continue to monitor Valdosta’s policies and actions to ensure it complies with the law.