



ACLU-WV Brings Lawsuit Against Public Official for Blocking Constituent on Social Media

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CHARLESTON, W.Va. – **The American Civil Liberties Union of West Virginia (ACLU-WV)** has filed a lawsuit in **Jefferson County Circuit Court** against a county commissioner for violating the First Amendment rights of a constituent.

It is unlawful for a government official or public agency to block a constituent from viewing or commenting on official social media pages under most circumstances. Courts have recognized that these pages are public forums and that blocking access to them is an unlawful restriction of free speech that deprives people of the ability to communicate with officials on pressing community matters.

“The right to critique public officials lies at the very heart of the First Amendment,” **ACLU-WV Legal Director Aubrey Sparks** said. “Federal court rulings binding on West Virginia have found that the official social media accounts of government officials and agencies are public forums. We look forward to a ruling clarifying the matter at the state court level as well.”

In May of 2022, **Jefferson County Commissioner Steve Stolipher** blocked Harpers Ferry resident **Christy Stadig** from his Facebook page. Stadig discovered she was blocked after a brief, though civil, exchange with the commissioner about the county’s recent financial audit. Stadig later confronted Stolipher publicly at a Jefferson County Republican Executive Committee meeting to ask to be unblocked. Stolipher laughed at her request.

People being blocked by public Facebook pages is one of the most common complaints received by Sparks’ department, she said.

“As more and more politicians and public agencies turn to social media to help spread their message, the problem of unlawful blocking has increasingly become an issue,” she said. “We look forward to putting this matter to rest once and for all. If a politician’s skin is too thin to withstand questions from the people they represent, then they maintain the right to simply stay off of social media.”

Stadig said she chose to bring the lawsuit because she wants regular people to know that their constitutional rights are worth defending.

“I want people to know that restrictions on free speech from government officials, big or small, are important and that we are not without tools to fight back for our rights,” she said.

Public officials have the right to restrict access to their pages under certain circumstances, like if their safety is being threatened. That’s why ACLU-WV has also compiled a [toolkit](#) to help people better understand their rights. If a government official has blocked you on social media, review the toolkit below to determine if your rights may have been violated.

