News




A marquee for Covington Catholic High School is seen in Park Hills, Ky., Jan. 23, 2019. Nick Sandmann, a junior at the school, filed a $250 million defamation lawsuit Feb. 19 against the Washington Post claiming the newspaper's coverage of the encounter with Native American Nathan Phillips Jan. 18 near the Lincoln Memorial in Washington was biased. (CNS/Madalyn McGarvey, Reuters)



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Washington — April 12, 2019

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Lawyers for The Washington Post filed a motion in federal court April 9 seeking the dismissal of the $250 million defamation lawsuit filed against the newspaper by Nick Sandmann, a student at Kentucky's Covington Catholic High School.

The student was thrown into the center of a national spotlight in January when videos of him and his classmates interacting with Native Americans and others near Washington's Lincoln Memorial went viral.

In the Feb. 19 lawsuit, the 16-year-old student alleged that the Post's coverage of the incident was biased, claiming there were "no less than six false and defamatory articles" in the newspaper about the Jan. 18 encounter.

In its defense, in the motion filed in U.S. District Court in Covington, The Washington Post's legal team said its stories of that day's interaction were accurate and noted that even if they weren't "flattering of the Covington Catholic students" who were involved, they "do not give rise to a defamation claim by Sandmann."

The Post's legal team also said the "story was an emerging one" and that readers would not have "understood the initial article as having told the whole story."

"Newspapers are often unable to publish a complete account of events when they first come to light," the motion said, adding that the coverage of the event gained more context as more information became available.

The lawsuit against the Post said the newspaper ignored "basic journalist standards" and published defamatory stories about Sandmann in an effort to advance an agenda against President Donald Trump.

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"Politics has nothing to do with this case, and law warrants its dismissal," the Post's lawyers said in the motion.

The complaint is seeking $250 million because Jeff Bezos, Amazon CEO, paid that amount for the newspaper when he bought it six years ago. Sandmann's legal team is suing CNN for $275 million in a defamation lawsuit and sent letters to national media outlets, public figures and Catholic dioceses and archdioceses warning of possible legal action for coverage or statements made about the incident.

Sandmann, a junior at Kentucky's Covington Catholic High School, is known now for wearing a "Make America Great Again" hat while smiling just inches away from a Native American leader, Nathan Phillips, who faced him as he chanted and beat a drum. Sandmann and his classmates were in Washington for the annual March for Life.

The teen is represented by Todd McMurtry of the Covington-based law firm Hemmer DeFrank Wessels and by L. Lin Wood, an Atlanta attorney involved in high-profile defamation suits.

Sandmann's attorneys said in a Jan. 25 statement that members of the media and others "rushed to condemn and vilify this young man by burying him in an avalanche of false accusations, false portrayals and cyberbullying that have threatened his reputation and his physical safety."