

**NEWS RELEASE**

**TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 25, 2007**

**ACLU ANNOUNCES SETTLEMENT IN SUIT AGAINST RHODE ISLAND COLLEGE  
FOR CENSORING REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS SIGN DISPLAY**

The ACLU of Rhode Island today announced a favorable settlement in its lawsuit against Rhode Island College for censoring a sign display supporting reproductive freedom that was sponsored by a student women's rights group on campus. The signs were taken down after administrators received objections about them from a priest. The ACLU lawsuit, filed by volunteer attorney Jennifer Azevedo, had argued that the college violated the First Amendment rights of the student group, the Women's Studies Organization (WSO) of RIC, and its three student officers. The highlight of the settlement is an award by RIC of \$5,000 to the student group.

In December 2005, the WSO, in conjunction with a general day of activism on women's issues to take place the next day, put up a series of signs on a grassy area beside the entrance road on RIC property. The signs stated, "Keep your rosaries off our ovaries", "Our bodies, our choice", "Brought to you by RIC Women's Studies Organization." Shortly after the signs went up, they were seen by a priest driving onto the campus to conduct a weekly Mass at the home of RIC President John Nazarian. After the priest raised concerns about them, President Nazarian immediately contacted the campus police and ordered the signs taken down. He subsequently advised the students that additional approval stages were required to post signs, even though they had previously been assured that they had followed all the necessary steps.

Under the settlement agreement, the College does not admit any liability for its actions that night, but has agreed to give \$5,000 to the WSO, and also to pay \$6,350 in attorneys fees and costs. In addition, the College has adopted a uniform policy governing all signage posted on the college roadways. The policy limits roadway displays to directional signs for campus events. It requires the signs to be prepared by the college "to foster and maintain an uncluttered and attractive entrance to the campus," but specifies that the event title's text for the signs "shall be chosen by the sponsoring entity alone." The policy does not limit sign postings at other locations on campus. One of the issues raised in the lawsuit was that the college selectively enforced previous campus roadway signage policies, and the ACLU and WSO indicated they would monitor how the new policy is implemented.

WSO President Jennifer Magaw said today, "I hope this settlement will encourage other student groups to be more vocal with their views. College is a place for the free exchange of ideas and I can now be proud to say I attend a school which allows the free speech rights that are essential to a learning community. I look forward to broadening the dialogue on women's rights in the coming year." Past WSO President Nichole Aguiar added: "This settlement is not only a victory for free speech – it is a win for women's rights! I hope it inspires others to become activists and reminds all young women that they can make a difference." RIACLU volunteer Jennifer Azevedo stated: "Public universities and colleges, by their very nature, should be institutions which encourage the open exchange of ideas and support the freedom of speech necessary to convey those ideas. By agreeing to this settlement, RIC has accepted responsibility for the errors made in that regard in the past and by bringing this lawsuit, the plaintiffs have ensured that those errors won't be made again."

**FOR MORE INFORMATION, CONTACT:** Jennifer Magaw: 309-2120; Nichole Aguiar: 868-8353; Jennifer Azevedo: 453-1500; Steven Brown: 831-7171