

Derek Hutchinson
Auburn
LD 51

Good Day,

My name is Derek Hutchinson and I am currently enrolled at Central Maine Community College and have been since August of 2018. Going to college after being out of school for 28 years was very daunting, yet, I persevered. I had a religious exemption which allowed me to take my classes in-person, which for me, made all the difference about whether I succeeded or struggled. I graduated, and believe me, I earned my Human Service Degree. I graduated with a GPA of 3.298.

The end game of this schooling is to one day be a licensed Substance-Use-Disorder Counselor. So, with that in mind, I decided to pursue a 2nd degree in Social Science because I believe the two degrees paired well with one another for the career path I have decided to pursue...then Covid hit.

I was banned from going to the CMCC campus, which obviously meant I could not take any on-site classes, because the religious exemption was done away with and I refused to be vaccinated for Covid. (Although I worked with high-risk clients, I have never contracted Covid but I know many who were vaccinated but were struck down by the disease, some, many times) In order to go to the campus and have on-site classes, I would need 2 Covid vaccinations along with 2 boosters. I declined and was forced into only online classes. Let me tell you how that worked out.

In my entire CMCC career, I had never had a withdrawal because I could not do the work, yet, now on my transcript, I have 3, directly caused by the administrations' requirement of only letting those who were vaccinated against Covid on campus and the repeal of the religious exemption. I am a very conscientious student. If I do not understand a concept, I raise my hand and get my question answered. In the online format, that is not possible. I was pigeonholed into many classes I would not have taken had I been allowed on campus, but, because the classes that were offered online were very limited, I was forced to take them.

In closing, I want to say that students, like myself, need the religious exemption...we need to learn on-site. We are no more a danger to others because we are unvaccinated than those who were/are vaccinated, but still contracted Covid. I am appealing to those in power to repeal the ban on religious exemptions because it is unfair, unneeded, and does not do what it is intended to do.

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