

FATHER SUES SCHOOL DISTRICT ALLEGING DISCRIMINATION AND HARASSMENT OWING TO HIS DAUGHTERS RACE



Fred Lane, of Blue Springs, Missouri has taken the Blue Springs School District to court, accusing them of racial discrimination. He has alleged that his daughter's basketball coaches made a video, superimposing the image of a monkey over his daughter's face, who is African-American. The petition filed on October 10 in Jackson County Circuit Court alleges that Lane's daughter Cloé Lane was "the target of racial discrimination, harassment and retaliation by her basketball coaches." Cloé had made it to the Blue Springs South High School, girls' basketball team during her freshman year and her coaches were Fawna Harrison and Rachel Donaldson. According to the court filing, around this time last year, Harrison made a video that featured Cloé. However, she covered the girl's face with that of an orangutan. The video also had monkey sounds in the background. Even though Cloé requested Harrison not to show the video to other, the petition alleges, that Harrison showed it to others in the school. Harrison, explaining the video to a newspaper said that there was no intent of racial slur and that the video was made on the specific request of the players, including Cloé, who wanted Harrison to make a video based on the application Monk-e-mail, which the players had seen in an email that she, Harrison, had received. Since the players had asked her to use their photos in the program, she superimposed the players' faces, not only Cloé's face but that of white players also, onto the monkeys' bodies. The video was meant to be funny. Harrison said that Cloé even asked her to send the video to other coaches. "We laughed about it. It had nothing to do with race. That didn't even enter my mind when I did it," the coach said. Moreover the Blue Springs South basketball team was a diverse team with 16 white girls, 14 African-American girls, 2 Hispanics and 1 Samoan girl, according to Mark Bubalo, the Blue Springs School District's activities director. Bubalo said that internal investigations and discussion with parents, teachers, teammates and others failed to substantiate the allegations made by Cloé's father and that he did not find any proof of racial discrimination or harassment against her. Bubalo said that something was amiss considering that the complaint was filed three months after the video was shot and that just a month earlier Cloé was asked to cool her heels on the bench as she had been tardy in coming for practice sessions. The petition also claims that coaches, Harrison and Donaldson, both white, had allowed the girls to go into the water during a 'float trip' without wearing life jackets, even though they knew that Cloé did not know how to swim. Lane had been assured by the coaches that wearing life-jackets was mandatory. The petition says that Cloé "was swept off her feet, went under water multiple times, and screamed for help." The claim, then goes on to level serious charges, that oblivious to his daughter's shouting for help, both the coaches, "sat on the bank, watching, laughing and taking photographs of plaintiff Cloé Lane's struggle." Harrison ridiculed the accusation saying that nobody's life was in danger and that the water was only knee-deep. The petition also accuses the coaches of humbling Cloé by chastising her in front of her teammates, in January, telling her that it was her poor performance that had resulted in the team losing a particular match. The petition says that the school should have known that his daughter was being harassed and discriminated against and that it "was motivated by plaintiff Cloé Lane's race," and the school district failed to take remedial action.