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Section: A SECTION

Edition:

Page: A1

Column:

Memo:

Memo2:

Correction:

TEEN WITH LIMP SUES TO MARCH WITH BAND \ N ROBERT CORBIN, 15, SAYS HE WAS HUMILIATED AND KEPT OFF THE FIELD - IN VIOLATION OF THE AMERICANS WITH DISABILITIES ACT.

Byline: JENI BROCK STEELE OF THE NEWS STAFF

Source:

All he wanted to do was march with the band, even though he limped.

But a lawsuit filed in federal court this week alleges the St. Lucie County School Board and a band director violated the Americans With Disabilities Act in their treatment of Robert Corbin, a 15-year-old sophomore at St. Lucie West Centennial High School. The lawsuit alleges that Corbin, a drummer, has repeatedly been re-buffed in his requests to perform with the Centennial band because he walks with a pronounced limp, caused by an injury in a car accident when he was 9.

"All this young man wants to do is be treated normally," said Corbin's attorney, **Lance Richard**. "And they won't do that because he limps."

The lawsuit names as defendants the St. Lucie County School Board and Centennial band director Lonnie Hill.

When contacted Thursday, Hill said he is "not allowed" to discuss the lawsuit.

Attorney Dan Harrell, who represents the school board, said he had not seen the lawsuit and because it involves a student, it would be inappropriate to comment on it.

"Anything that has to do with a student must remain confidential," he said.

Corbin, in an interview, said he has been belittled and humiliated in front of his fellow students. Once, when the band was scored on two performances, only one of which Corbin participated in, Hill showed the differing scores to students in the drum line, Corbin said, and called attention to the lower scores when Corbin marched.

"He made it very clear that he meant the drum line was better when I didn't march with them," Corbin said.

Two students then wrote a sarcastic message on the chalkboard, thanking "Robert Corbin for screwing up the drum line," he said.

Corbin said the band director allowed the message to stay on the board long enough for at least one band class to see it later in the day.

"It was so embarrassing," Corbin said.

The lawsuit also alleges Hill made insulting remarks in front of school personnel, Corbin and his parents.

"And the school people have known about this since September because that's how long we've been dealing with them," Corbin said.

His mother, Violet Corbin, said that when her son got involved with the band during his freshman year, he was told freshmen rarely participated with upper-classmen band members. "So for the first year, we didn't push it," she said. But the next summer - after Corbin became a sophomore - he began participating during summer band camp just like other students.

The suit alleges Hill still would not allow Corbin to march; instead, the youngster was told to switch from playing drums to cymbals. Hill then told the student he had to play "in the pit," the football field sidelines, where some of the other percussionists play, the suit states.

"Robert kept asking and asking to march with the band, but they just kept refusing," his mother said.

So she approached the band director to ask why. "He told us that Robert couldn't do the maneuvers, the crossover, or the crab walk, all these steps he did that Robert couldn't do," she said. "I can't even begin to tell you how bad that hurt."

Corbin said the humiliation and stress caused his grade-point average to drop from a 3.0 to 2.5.

"I come home and just want to sleep," he said. "I really don't have much motivation to do anything else. I don't even want to do my homework, anymore."

Although the lawsuit asks for unspecified monetary damages, that's not the reason for it, Robert Corbin said. "I just don't want to see anybody else have to go through what I've had to go through," he said.

Illustration: (B/W) Photo by Rick Silva: Robert Corbin, a sophomore at Centennial High School in Port St. Lucie, has brought a discrimination lawsuit against the school, stemming from the treatment he has received due to a disability he received in a car accident.

Caption:

Chart: