

CUA president pleased ruling confirms legality of single-sex dorms

WASHINGTON - John Garvey, president of The Catholic University of America, said he was "gratified" by the dismissal of a complaint filed against the university saying its single-sex dorms discriminated against women.

"We were confident from the beginning that our actions were entirely legal," Garvey said in a statement.

The Nov. 29 order by the District of Columbia's Office of Human Rights said offering only single-sex dormitories is not unlawful discrimination under the city's Human Rights Act.

It noted that if colleges were to comply with the complaint's reasoning, it would cause "a prohibition on same-sex bathrooms, locker rooms and sports teams, which would lead to absurd results."

The complaint was filed by John Banzhaf, a public-interest law professor at George Washington University, also in Washington. Banzhaf filed another complaint in October against Catholic University, saying the school discriminated against Muslim students by failing to provide prayer rooms free of Catholic symbols. The complaint is still pending before the Human Rights Office.

In an Oct. 28 statement to parents, students and faculty members, Garvey called that complaint a "manufactured controversy."

The order dismissing the complaint against single-sex dorms pointed out that Banzhaf only provided "conjecture and speculation" instead of facts about how single-sex dorms might negatively affect women.

It also said Banzhaf "has not demonstrated that women would not have equivalent access to educational opportunities or be subject to any material harm."

Banzhaf had argued that women are concerned and frightened by having to walk alone outside the single-sex residence hall and that women who constitute only a small percentage of students in an academic discipline will be at a considerable disadvantage in forming networking connections compared to male students.

Banzhaf has filed successful discrimination complaints during the past 20 years, ranging from nonsmokers' rights to discrimination against women on the basis of higher prices charged by dry cleaners for women's shirts.

Garvey announced June 13 that the university would be taking a stand against binge drinking and the "culture of hooking up" by phasing out coed dorms.

He likened the move to a "slightly old-fashioned remedy" to combat what he described as the "two most serious ethical challenges college students face."

Garvey made the announcement public in an op-ed piece in The Wall Street Journal, saying the transition will "probably cost more money" and will involve architectural adjustments as well as a change in the ratio of students admitted each year. "But our students will be better off," he wrote.

In his Nov. 29 statement, Garvey said he was "thankful for the outpouring of public support for our right to implement a principled decision to transition to single-sex residence halls. We will continue down that path."