

Clovis Unified says agreement reached with student to wear eagle feather at Clovis High graduation

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An agreement was reached Tuesday night between Clovis Unified and a Clovis High senior who wants to wear a ceremonial eagle feather at his graduation ceremony this week, the school district announced.

The statement from Clovis Unified spokesman Kelly Avants gave no details about the agreement, other than to say it is "largely consistent with offers previously made by the district to accommodate" student Christian Titman's desire to wear the feather at Thursday's ceremony.

The district said the agreement was reached after Tuesday's hearing in Fresno County Superior Court on whether the district violated Titman's civil rights by barring the use of the feather in his graduation cap.

Judge Donald Black had continued the hearing to Wednesday afternoon but urged representatives of Titman and the school district to continue to negotiate that night. The statement from Clovis Unified said the announced agreement "paves the way" for cancellation of a hearing Wednesday.

Clovis Unified Superintendent Janet Young said in the statement: "It has been our goal from the beginning to find a mutually agreeable solution that honors and respects the culture of our Native American students while affirming our long-standing traditions and standards honoring every one of our graduating seniors."

There was no immediate response to the Clovis Unified announcement from the Titman family.

On Tuesday, Titman's attorneys were seeking a temporary restraining order against the district that would allow him to wear the eagle feather on the tassel of his graduation cap.

Judge Black suggested Titman's representatives, which include lawyers for the American Civil Liberties Union of Northern California and the Native American Rights Fund, delay the hearing a day. They agreed.

Black noted that both Titman's deposition to the court and an email from the district to Titman mentioned wearing the feather in his hair instead of on the cap.

Titman's deposition said the feather is traditionally worn as part of a headdress or in the hair as a sign of achievement and as a cultural symbol.

Clovis Unified said wearing a feather in the hair would not be in violation of its graduation dress code, which does allow some sashes and pins but does not allow anything that could be construed as "disruptive" to the ceremony. The district says it has denied appeals to wear rosaries or other unapproved adornments during previous ceremonies.

Novella Coleman, the ACLU attorney representing Titman, said the issue was whether Titman, 18, can display his feather prominently enough to show his cultural, religious and spiritual beliefs to everyone at the ceremony. She said Titman is open to wearing the feather in his hair if these standards are met.

Coleman, Titman's other attorneys and lawyers from the district met outside the courthouse for more than an hour after the hearing was delayed. They modeled the prospective tassel, feather attached, on Titman.

After the Titman case is resolved, Coleman said, the ACLU could pursue additional litigation to establish a permanent standard allowing all Native American students to adorn their graduation caps.

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