Transgender student wins partial victory against U of M

Human rights commission grants Damien Leggett mediation with university


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A transgender student at the University of Manitoba has won a partial victory in his human rights complaint against the school.

Damien Leggett was transitioning from female to male while enrolled in the university's Inner-City ACCESS program in social work.

In a complaint filed with the Manitoba Human Rights Commission, Leggett said he felt humiliated because university staff refused to accept his gender change and regularly referred to him as a female.

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The commission has determined that the university did not do enough to ensure staff addressed Leggett properly.

The university will now have to enter mediation with Leggett — something he has wanted.

"That felt really incredible," he said of the ruling on Tuesday.

"Especially the part where they said that … the transition is a really difficult and sensitive process. I felt like finally there's somebody who understands that this was not an easy thing for me to be doing."

According to Leggett's complaint, a professor once explained that she didn't have to refer to him by anything but his birth name.

Another suggested that if Leggett had a moustache, she would consider calling him a man.

"I was so shocked by that kind of behaviour that it kind of threw me into like a tailspin," he said. "Not only was it embarrassing, but it's also, like, shocking."

The commission did rule in favour of the University of Manitoba on other issues contained in Leggett's complaint.

For example, it says the university did grant Leggett access to a gender-neutral washroom within a reasonable time frame.

As well, the commission agreed that the university was not discriminatory in its disciplinary actions involving Leggett.

Leggett had been dismissed from the social work program due to complaints about a Facebook group and unprofessional behaviour.

In a statement, the University of Manitoba told CBC News it's "pleased that it has been exonerated on the vast majority of issues brought before the Human Rights Commission as part of this file, including agreement that the University of Manitoba was not discriminatory in its disciplinary actions."

The university accepts the advice given in the report and will "continue to look at ways to provide the most welcoming environment possible," a spokesperson said.

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