



Disability History and Awareness Month 2023

Charli Li is a disabled international student who formerly attended Willamette Law and has multiple potentially fatal cardiovascular and gastrointestinal disabilities. She aspired to become a lawyer to fight for underserved or otherwise vulnerable communities, but, due to a series of unfortunate events, she instead found a platform raising awareness about systemic ableism within higher education.



Once a Presidential Scholar at Willamette Law, Li quickly found herself on the wrong end of multiple school investigations, which painted her as “combative” and insinuated that she misrepresented her status as a disabled person. The investigations came about as a result of an altercation with a fellow student. Li maintains that the student engaged in hostile behavior first and that her threat to “slam papers back in their face” was to stand up for herself. The other student alleges that Li threatened to slap them. Li was ultimately placed on suspended leave for eight weeks and a mandatory probationary period under the threat of more severe consequences. The College of Law concurrently investigated and concluded that Li spoke in a “combative, disrespectful, and not entirely honest way” – the last charge being in reference to her status as a disabled person.

Following the investigations, Li was dismissed from the college and barred from taking the Oregon State Bar exam. Additionally, her student insurance was revoked, and as an international student, she could not get different insurance and risked deportation. To this point, Li has maintained her innocence, insisting that her dismissal resulted from a private institution discriminating based on race, nationality, and disability. She has continued to be in and out of intensive care since her dismissal – held liable for the total cost of her health needs. During this time, she has used her social media to spread awareness about her type of disability and the struggles of not being entirely accepted or integrated into society.

Profiles by Andrew Caruana, Policy and Research Intern, Office of Senator Sara Gelser Blouin

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