

The receiving media
coverage does not
make a



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The case

The topic of the selected amicus curiae brief is defamation. The case was filed in the Supreme Court of the United States in the year 1979 and involved Hutchinson versus Proxmire. The main issue of the case was whether a research scientist could be described as a public figure for the application of libel law given that he received funds from public coffers, thus making it difficult for the scientist to go to court to sue for slander (American Psychological Association, n. d, para. 1). Proxmire had uttered false and defamatory statements against Hutchinson because he considered him a public figure.

Facts of the case

The case originated from a ruling by the Seventh Circuit that supported a decision by the district court to give Proxmire permission for a summary judgment in a slander case against him (American Psychological Association, n. d, para. 3). For ease of determining the case, the lower courts had decided that Hutchinson was a public figure and Proxmire put that fact into consideration in his statements.

The petitioner was Dr. Hutchinson, a researcher who was receiving funds from a government agency. On the other hand, the respondent was the Senator of Wisconsin, William Proxmire (American Psychological Association, n. d, para. 3).

Proxmire had established an award scheme referred to as the Golden Fleece of the Month Award. The award was to be given to a person or an organization that had spent public funds in the most doubtful way. As a

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result, Proxmire presented the award to the organization that was funding Hutchinson. Proxmire claimed that Hutchinson's research was nonsensical and worthless. In addition, he claimed that Hutchinson had enriched himself through the funding that he received from the government agency (American Psychological Association, n. d, para. 3).

The district court accepted Proxmire's request for a summary judgment after gathering some information that insinuated that Hutchison was a public figure. The court wanted Hutchinson to prove that the slanderous statements were made with disregard to the fact that he was not a public figure and that they were false. The district court in association with the Seventh Circuit decided that Hutchinson was a public figure because he was receiving public funds for his research studies, received media coverage for his work, and had published the findings of his studies for academic purposes (American Psychological Association, n. d, para. 5).

APA's position

APA presented a brief to the Supreme Court claiming that the lower courts had shown bias in deciding whether Hutchinson was a public figure or not. It claimed that the courts crossed the boundaries of the definition of a public figure as given by the Supreme Court. They expanded the definition and as such concluded that Hutchinson was a public figure. Secondly, it argued that Hutchinson was not a public figure even though he received public funds to finance his research. In addition, APA argued that receiving media coverage does not make a person a public figure (American Psychological Association, n. d, para. 6).

Results of the case

The Supreme Court ruled that Hutchinson did not qualify for the title of a public figure based on the evidence presented. The court ruled that Proxmire's statements were false and disregarded the fact that Hutchinson did not qualify for the title of a public figure. After the ruling of the Supreme Court, Proxmire agreed to apologize in public for his statements against Hutchinson. In addition, he agreed to avoid such an incident and paid \$ 25,000 in damages to Hutchinson (American Psychological Association, n. d, para. 7). I agree with APA's position because a person does not become a public figure because the government funds his or her work or because the person gets media coverage.

Reference

American Psychological Association.

(n. d). Hutchinson v. Proxmire.

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