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• FirstClass

Slurs bring civil suit against UM student

By Kathryn Ritchie and Paul Livingstone
Maine Campus staff

The Maine Attorney General's Office filed a civil suit yesterday against a University of Maine student who allegedly used the First-Class computer system to make threatening statements directed at gays, lesbians and bisexuals.

The suit claims Casey Belanger, 19, of Orono, violated the Maine Civil Rights Act.

According to the suit, Belanger

wrote on his FirstClass resume that he "dislike[d] fags." When someone responded to his resume posting, Belanger allegedly sent a post to the gay/lesbian/bisexual, religion, politics and debate folders on Oct. 16 containing derogatory language:

"My resume includes whatever the f—I want it to include. I will not be harassed about it nor will I stand for faggot motherf——

like yourself trying their best to stir up controversy ... youd better watch your f—— back you little f——, Im gonna shoot you in the back of the f—— head if I ever see your faggot ass."

Assistant Attorney General Stephen Wessler said Belanger's victims were "anybody who read that message."

The Attorney General's office

believed that because of the message's language, there was a reasonable fear of violence from Belanger.

"Bias motivated threats of violence have absolutely no place anywhere in society, including our universities and colleges," Attorney General Andrew Ketterer said.

"This is the first civil rights case (in the state) based on a threat

sent over the computer," said Wessler, who is also the chief of the Civil Rights Division.

He said his office works closely with police and public safety departments across the state to work and train one member of each force on civil rights. UMaine Public Safety Investigator Chris Gardner, who was

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not available for comment yesterday afternoon, is Public Safety's civil rights officer.

In the civil suit, the Attorney General's office is seeking a restraining order on Belanger to prohibit him "from making threats of violence or committing acts of violence motivated by reason of the victim's sexual orientation, race, color, religion, ancestry, national origin, physical or mental disability."

Wessler said a judge will not make a decision on the permanent injunction until the suit goes to court in a few weeks.

Belanger declined to comment on the suit last evening.

"The chances of immediate repetition are reduced immediately," Wessler said.

He added that if Belanger were to make threatening remarks before the case goes to court, an emergency restraining order could be given by the court.

UMaine President Peter Hoff issued a statement accompanying the press release that announced the suit.

"While freedom to express one's point

of view is a treasured right, there is no such right to threaten bodily harm to others," Hoff said. "The university does not, and will not, condone such behavior by anyone."

Hoff further promised that the "university will act quickly and decisively to stop such behavior."

Public Affairs spokesman Joe Carr said

Belanger is still a student and has been referred to judicial affairs because of the incident.

A comprehensive policy regulating content on FirstClass has not yet been established by UMaine. An ad hoc committee has been formed by the University of Maine System's board of trustees to discuss possible guidelines, but it has not convened.