




his vision for valor



**"I stand
across
the street
over there
because
nobody
else does,"
Gavin
Moody '22
said.**

*turn the page
to keep reading*

by: Kira Zizzo

One student is taking a stand against Valor Christian High School's treatment of LGBTQ+ staff and students.



PC: K. Zizzo

The thick, vibrant, garnet-tinged rims of Gavin Moody '22's glasses envelop lenses, reflecting the transient glint of car headlights and fluctuating hues of traffic lights as he stands on the sidewalk across from Valor Christian High School (VCHS), protesting their treatment of LGBTQ+ staff members and students, particularly Inoke Tonga and Lauren Benner.

In a recent social media post, former VCHS volleyball coach, Inoke Tonga shared how he was called to by school administrators, forced to either denounce being a gay man or leave his position by school administrators Aug. 2021. School administrators labeled his homosexuality as "a danger", according to the *Denver Post*. Tonga resigned and his story made national news, generating a dialogue surrounding LGBTQ+ discrimination in schools.

Following Tonga's experience with VCHS, numerous students came forward along with Lauren Benner, a former women's lacrosse coach at VCHS, who shared a similar story. She was also called to a meeting with school administrators, with the belief she would be receiving a raise. Instead, they asked her if she was dating a woman. School administrators subsequently told her that if she wanted to pursue a relationship with another woman, it wouldn't align with VCHS's culture statement, *9NEWS*

reported. Benner resigned from her position in 2020.

Moody found out about this controversial situation during a current events assignment as a part of Kate Herrin's English class. This assignment instructed Moody to find a Colorado news, national news, and world news. He learned that VCHS was awarded the National Blue Ribbon by the United States Department of Education (USDE).

"The National Blue Ribbon Schools Program recognizes public and private elementary, middle, and high schools based on their overall academic excellence or their progress in closing achievement gaps among student subgroups," the USDE website said.

Moody felt that VCHS was undeserving of this award due to the school's treatment of the LGBTQ+ community.

"The federal United States government rewarded this school that fired two coaches for being gay and they received awards for it. That's not right. I think that's bullshit," Moody said.

Every day after school, he stands on the sidewalk facing VCHS, holding a sign and protesting by himself against the forced resignation of two LGBTQ+ coaches and mistreatment of LGBTQ+ students.



PC: K. Zizzo

taking a stand Moody protests the treatment of LGBTQ+ staff and students on the sidewalk across from VCHS Nov.12.

"I stand across the street over there because nobody else does," Moody said. "I'm bisexual. I see people in my community, who I love, being discriminated against because of something that's completely arbitrary and out of their control. I can do something about it by standing there for 30 minutes."

Moody's moved his work schedule so he can protest at the time that the VCHS school day ends, ensuring his message reaches a larger audience. He plans to protest year-round, or until his goals for furthering support for the LGBTQ+ community are met.

"My end goal is to be able to stand on the sidewalk surrounding Valor and get a bunch of people holding hands, literally locking the school with love," Moody said.

He is also fighting for a safe space inside of VCHS for LGBTQ+ students. Moody is advocating for the dismissal from employment of the administrators at VCHS who forced Tonga and Benner to resign. His final goal is that VCHS's Blue Ribbon award will be rescinded.

"We're only here for so long, might as well live how you want and find ways to move forward. Progress is inevitable," Moody said.

In his four months of individual protest, Moody's message for change has been met with mixed public responses. He appreciates the power of simple positive gestures.

"There's this one white truck that comes around 3:30. Almost every day I've been out here, he honks at me and gives me a thumbs up. Those little things are really sweet," Moody said.

However, positive public interactions have been limited for Moody as he faces backlash on a daily basis.

"The people of Valor told me I was going to hell for holding up a

sign," Moody said. "Since I come out here every day, I just hold up the sign, I have been flipped off every single day. I've been told to go home and that nobody cares. I've had entire cars flip me off and received a lot of frowns."

Moody views these negative actions in a humorous light, finding irony in this situation.

"These are the people who hold up the moral high ground, they're like 'we are the people who

"Just in being outside of Valor for a couple of months, I've received more hate and prejudice than I'd ever received in my 17 years of life because I believe in things like this," Moody said.

will get into heaven because we tell people holding up signs to go to hell' I just think it's funny."

In comparison with VCHS, Moody finds Rock Canyon High School (RCHS) to be more respectful and inclusive toward LGBTQ+ students and staff.

"Our school treats [LGBTQ+ students] better than Valor does, they're not hard to beat, but definitely, because there are actual clubs, recognition within the school, and I feel like people there are a lot more accepting of it too," Moody

said.

He also noted that a majority of the classroom at RCHS have "Safe Space" stickers on classroom doors, signifying that LGBTQ+ students are welcome in those rooms.

RCHS student Addie Waller '24 was unaware that Moody protests daily.

"I support him [Moody]. If a person loves the same gender, they should have the right to do that and express themselves. I feel like the Valor decision wasn't very accommodating for those coaches.

Moody encourages students to visit Valor for Change's website, follow their social media accounts, and join him in protesting VCHS. "Come stand with me."

Editor's note: VCHS declined to comment on this situation.