

Student Leaves Ham Sandwich on Lunch Table Near Muslims, Suspended for Hate Crime

Somali Muslim Students Highly Offended, Scarred for Life

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A middle school student in Lewiston, Maine is being investigated by the police for a possible hate crime after he placed a bag containing a ham sandwich on a table where Somali students eat lunch. According to the school's superintendent, Leon Levesque, the student has been suspended, and more disciplinary action could follow pending the outcome of the investigation.

Muslims, who believe pork to be unclean and highly offensive, were reminded of a man who threw a pig's head into a mosque located in Lewiston last summer. "That ham sandwich in a bag where we couldn't even see might as well have been that pig's head," said one of the traumatized Somali students, "and that cafeteria might as well have been the most religious building for Muslims in the state of Maine."

According to Superintendent Levesque, "the school incident is being treated seriously as a hate incident." Police are currently investigating the matter alongside the Center for the Prevention of Hate Violence, who is also working with the school to create an anti-ham "response plan."

"We've got some work to do to turn this around and bring the school community back together again." Said Levesque, "These children have got to learn that ham is not a toy, and that there are consequences for being nonchalant about where you put your sandwich."

"Placing ham where Muslim students were eating as an awful thing," said Stephen Wessler, the executive director of the Center for Prevention of Hate Violence. "It's extraordinarily hurtful and degrading. They probably felt like they were back in Mogadishu starving and being shot at. No child, Muslim or normal, should have to endure touching a ham sandwich."

Wessler continued, "incidents like this that involve degrading language or conduct are often said by the perpetrator as a joke. But unfortunately we don't live in a world where young children try to be funny, we live in a society in which these types of actions always escalate into violence against minorities."

"If people think insulting Muslims with ham is okay, more degrading acts will follow. The Jews had to go through the same thing when the Nazis would force-feed them bacon; do we really want our schools to become concentration camps?"

Added Levesque, "the incident does not reflect the moral values of the school staff and students. We need to take a look at this and review how a careless act is degrading and causes hurt to other people. All our students should feel welcome in our schools, knowing that they are safe from attacks with ham, bacon, porkchops, or any other delicious meat that comes from pigs." According to Levesque, a letter has been sent home to parents to explain the incident and outline the school's response. The next step will be for Wessler to meet with the students to address the school's atmosphere, after which staff will discuss how to respond to future hate incidents, with emphasis on their prevention.

Said one of the students who witnessed the event, "I know the guy who put the sandwich there, he just wanted to be funny and see how those Somalis would react. I'm just glad that kid I beat up yesterday was white; I wouldn't want to be in that mess."

One of the victims, whose mother didn't want his name released, said "we didn't know what was in this bag. One of my friends reached inside it. It was a big ham steak. There were five of us at the table, all Somali. Right then, I could feel allah condemning me to burn for eternity for being within a 6.2 meter radius of ham, so yeah, it was a hate crime."

The boy said that he felt better after several students apologized for the incident and said that the kids who did it were jerks, "but for the rest of my life when I remember middle school, this will pop up right away," the boy said, "it's like I'm back in Somalia being shot at all over again."