

# Michigan 8th grader fights for First Amendment rights

**J. Cooper****6 March 2025**

Danielle Khalaf, 14, an eighth-grader at East Middle School in Plymouth, Michigan, is fighting to defend her First Amendment rights under conditions in which all constitutional rights are under attack by the president and ruling oligarchy of the United States.

On January 10, Danielle refused to stand for the Pledge of Allegiance. “I decided I wanted to sit down because I didn’t feel comfortable standing because of what’s happening in Palestine,” declared Danielle, describing the event at a press conference on February 27. “After the pledge was over, the teacher said that anyone sitting down was being very disrespectful to soldiers, to America,” she continued.

Danielle reported that she approached the teacher to explain her reason for refusing to stand, but was shouted at and told, “Since you live in this country and enjoy its freedom, if you don’t like it, you should go back to [your] country.” As a US citizen, Danielle was understandably distraught, and says she left the room in tears.

The Arab-American Civil Rights League (ACRL) is demanding accountability from the Plymouth-Canton School District, and threatening legal action.

The press conference was widely covered in the Detroit area, and continues to circulate on social media. One of the Facebook posts from WXYZ-TV has been viewed over 5,000 times and generated hundreds of supportive comments.

“As an actual veteran, I can definitely say that I did not spend four years overseas so some teacher in Michigan could berate a girl for not standing for the [pledge]. I served so that people could enjoy their constitutional rights and be safe,” wrote Brian A. Stone.

“The utter irony of people attacking this young woman for doing what this country should stand for,

the right to peacefully dissent (not storm the Capital and kill police),” wrote another commenter.

In response to a post that said “The teacher shouldn’t have said that but this girl should have stood up,” over a hundred responded defending Danielle’s constitutional right to protest. Reed Bennett wrote, “So that first amendment y’all love so much doesn’t apply to people you disagree with.”

“In this country we have the right, and are expected, to exercise a freedom to follow our conscience, not blindly follow something just because someone else believes differently. A single-minded set of actions born of one person’s mandate is NOT what our country is about. If you want to FORCE people into following ONE ideal, you are looking at a dictatorship, not what we are based on. Our forefathers wanted to ensure FREEDOM for ALL, not uniform directives demanding certain outcomes,” was another response.

Under the Biden administration, protests opposing the US-Israeli genocide in Gaza became the target of politicians in both the Republican and Democratic parties who overwhelmingly support the Zionist apartheid state of Israel. Pro-Palestinian sentiment and protest has been branded “antisemitism,” college students have been expelled or faced deportation, university presidents were forced to resign. The attacks on free speech rights initiated under Biden have now escalated under Trump.

On March 4, Trump issued a statement on his social media platform declaring, “All Federal Funding will STOP for any College, School, or University that allows illegal protests. Agitators will be imprisoned/or permanently sent back to the country from which they came. American students will be permanently expelled or, depending on on [sic] the crime, arrested. NO MASKS! ...”

The *World Socialist Web Site* commented, “Trump is placing himself above the Constitution and the Bill of Rights, and asserting police-state powers to imprison and deport any who voice public opposition to him or his government. ...” The WSWS has emphasized that the Democratic Party will not oppose Trump on these fascistic policies, reserving their opposition solely to support for the war against Russia in Ukraine.

Danielle Khalaf is to be applauded for her courage and her willingness to stand up for what she knows is right. The support shown for her indicates that, as the WSWS has stressed, there exists a profound historical connection in the population, particularly in the working class, to the principles of the American Revolution and the defense of democratic rights. The student walkouts on Tuesday in defense of immigrants, the protests of federal workers, and the upcoming Stand Up for Science demonstrations portend an explosive confrontation between the working class and all factions of the ruling class.

As one Facebook comment said, “I am a veteran and I would take a knee right now. What is happening in this country is appalling.”



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