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Disability Rights and Religious Liberty in Education

The Story behind *Zobrest v. Catalina Foothills School District*

BRUCE J. DIERENFIELD AND DAVID A. GERBER

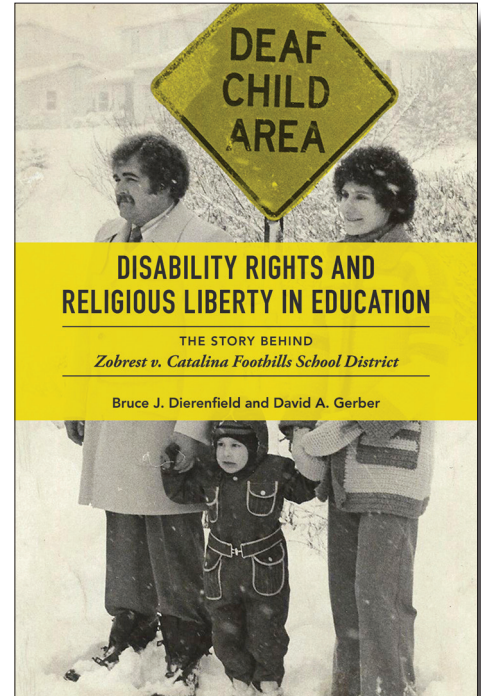
An important case at the crossroads of disability rights and church-state separation

In 1988, Sandi and Larry Zobrest sued a suburban Tucson, Arizona, school district that had denied their hearing-impaired son a taxpayer-funded interpreter in his Roman Catholic high school. The Catalina Foothills School District argued that providing a public resource for a private, religious school created an unlawful crossover between church and state. The Zobrests, however, claimed that the district had infringed on both their First Amendment right to freedom of religion and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

Bruce J. Dierenfield and David A. Gerber use the Zobrests' story to examine the complex history and jurisprudence of disability accommodation and educational mainstreaming. They look at the family's effort to acquire educational resources for their son starting in early childhood and the choices the Zobrests made to prepare him for life in the hearing world rather than the deaf community. Dierenfield and Gerber also analyze the thorny church-state issues and legal controversies that informed the case, its journey to the U.S. Supreme Court, and the impact of the high court's ruling on the course of disability accommodation and religious liberty.

BRUCE J. DIERENFIELD is a professor of history and director of the all-college honors program at Canisius College. His books include the prize-winning *The Battle over School Prayer: How Engel v. Vitale Changed America*.

DAVID GERBER is a University at Buffalo Distinguished Professor of History Emeritus and Director Emeritus of the University at Buffalo Center for Disability Studies. He is the author of *Authors of Their Lives: The Personal Correspondence of British Immigrants to North America in the Nineteenth Century*.



A volume in the series Disability Histories, edited by Kim Nielsen and Michael Rembis

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