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**UGA student seeks $2 million in lawsuit over use of Facebook photo**

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An attorney for Chelsea Chaney says this photo was illegally taken from the UGA freshman's Facebook page then used by her former high school for an Internet safety seminar.

A University of Georgia student recently filed a $2 million lawsuit against an official at her former high school and the Fayette County School District for using a photograph of her in a bikini without her permission.

The lawsuit alleges the photo was stolen from 19-year-old Chelsea Chaney’s Facebook page for use in an Internet safety seminar.

The now-UGA freshman had posted the photo taken during a family vacation in a semi-private forum of her Facebook page, where only “friends” and “friends of friends” had access to it.

The student’s attorney, Pete Wellborn, said the lawsuit is significant for the protection of people’s privacy.

“It would have been the easiest thing in the world for Chelsea to forget this ever happened, repress the memory and just move forward,” he said.

If she had done that, Wellborn said, she would have left the door open for a similar situation to happen to another young person.

The dollar amount sought in compensation for damages was to send a message, according to Wellborn.

“We came up with that amount to get their attention, but ultimately the amount will be left to a jury, and they might decide on $5 million or $500,000,” Wellborn said. “We wanted to make sure the requested relief was substantial enough to ensure that neither they nor any other school personnel ever do this to another young person.”

The legal action stems from when Chaney was a 17-year-old senior at Starr’s Mill High School in Fayetteville in October 2011 when it hosted a countywide “Community Awareness Seminar.”

A portion of the seminar concerning Internet safety was presented by the school district’s director of technology services. According to the lawsuit, the director visited various students’ Facebook pages looking for examples of how postings might lead to future embarrassments.

In a portion of Curtis Cearley’s presentation entitled “Social Networking,” he displayed a slide titled “Once it’s there it’s there to stay” that included a photo of a bikini-clad Chaney standing next to a life-size cutout of rap star Snoop Lion, then known as Snoop Dogg.

“Even more incredibly, the slide included Chelsea’s full name, which was clearly visible to all attendees at the seminar,” the lawsuit states.

“In short, to illustrate the manner in which Internet postings can later shame and disgrace the poster, Cearley stole Chelsea’s photograph and presented it out of context to intentionally shame and disgrace Chelsea by name in front of hundreds of her teachers, her peers, their parents and other Fayette County residents,” the lawsuit alleges.

The school administrator achieved his goal of illustrating Internet dangers, but broke the law in doing so, according to the lawsuit.

Chaney’s constitutional right to privacy was violated, the lawsuit alleges, and she also was slandered, libeled and victimized by theft.

The impact on the teen was immediate, according to the lawsuit, as students and even teachers fell into two distinct camps in the days following the seminar: One supported Chaney and condemned the invasion of her privacy, and the other “apparently believed that Chelsea ‘got what was coming to her.’ ”

The unauthorized use of Chaney’s photo not only caused the student emotional duress; it was illegal, according to the lawsuit, which alleges Cearley’s actions violated Facebook’s Statement of Rights and Responsibilities and the school district’s own policies governing Internet usage, privacy and other areas.

The school district is liable for Cearley’s actions because administrators had prior knowledge of the content of his seminar presentation and did nothing to stop him, the lawsuit alleges.

Chaney and her family contacted an attorney only after school officials refused a request to hold a brief assembly to address the issue of respecting people’s privacy, Wellborn said.

“If they had held that assembly, I never would have been called” to represent Chaney, he said.

The initial lawsuit wasn’t filed until May because Wellborn said he needed to conduct a lot of legal research prior to filing the action, but also he wanted to wait until after Chaney graduated from high school.