



Written by [Dave Bohon](#) on November 17, 2011

ACLU Demands Halt to Prayer at Private Nebraska Graduation Ceremony

But the ACLU called the move a sham, reported the [Associated Press](#), and sent a letter of protest to the district charging that the private ceremony carries the implied endorsement of the district, and that the prayers are still illegal.

“The current ceremony coercively subjects students to religious messages as the price of attending high school commencement,” said ACLU spokesperson Amy Miller. “This leaves some students and their families feeling like second-class participants at their own graduation.”



Miller said that while the district insists it has nothing to do with the ceremony, the school’s graduation materials make it clear that the district’s imprimatur is still on the proceedings. “It is perfectly acceptable to have a truly private graduation ceremony as a supplement to the official, school-sponsored event,” said Miller. “What is happening at Lakeview High is a sham separation and therefore unconstitutional.”

According to the [Lincoln Journal-Star](#), the ACLU letter to the district “cites case law it says shows the graduation ceremony’s unconstitutionality and the justification for a lawsuit should school officials fail to remove the prayers from the ceremony.”

Warned the letter: “Given the clear state of the law, Lakeview High may not attempt to bypass the Bill of Rights by declaring that a private group now runs the graduation ceremony. It is unfair to force students to accept a religious ceremony in order to receive their hard-earned diplomas and experience the once-in-a-lifetime moment of walking across the stage for graduation.”

At a school district meeting in mid-November, community members and students showed their overwhelming support for continuing the prayer, saying that the ACLU is out of line and should mind its own business. “The graduation is for us,” said one Lakeview High School senior, Dillan Wurdeman. “It’s to celebrate our accomplishments.... If we want [prayer], I think we should be able to have it.”

Fellow student McKinzie Miller told the board that the ceremony, which has been held for the past 10 years, isn’t meant to “influence religion in any way.”

The [Columbus Telegram](#) reported that district officials have not yet come to a decision on how they would address the ACLU’s demands.



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