



Written by [R. Cort Kirkwood](#) on April 7, 2011

## ACLU Sues Over Prayer In Rhode Island

The American Civil Liberties Union is attacking the Christian religion again. This time, the leftist group's Rhode Island chapter has filed suit on behalf of another of the ubiquitous minor students who simply can't stand any contemplation of the Almighty.

Jessica Ahlquist, a sophomore at [Cranston West High School](#) (picture, left) in [Cranston, R.I.](#), claims to believe, via her [trumped up lawsuit](#), that any reference to religion on public school property violates her constitutional rights.



Young Ahlquist objects to a prayer banner that has been hanging in the school auditorium for 50 years.

### The Prayer

The first graduating class of the school, according to the *Providence Journal*, put up the banner to remind students to seek God's guidance "so that they bring credit to the school." The banner went up in 1963.

It says:

OUR HEAVENLY FATHER,  
GRANT US EACH DAY THE DESIRE  
TO DO OUR BEST, TO GROW MENTALLY  
AND MORALLY AS WELL AS PHYSICALLY,  
TO BE KIND AND HELPFUL TO OUR  
CLASSMATES AND TEACHERS, TO BE  
HONEST WITH OURSELVES AS WELL AS  
WITH OTHERS, HELP US TO BE GOOD  
SPORTS AND SMILE WHEN WE LOSE AS  
WELL AS WHEN WE WIN, TEACH US THE  
VALUE OF TRUE FRIENDSHIP, HELP US  
ALWAYS TO CONDUCT OURSELVES SO AS  
TO BRING CREDIT TO CRANSTON HIGH  
SCHOOL WEST.  
AMEN

Such profoundly evil sentiments apparently aroused Lady Ahlquist's ire and made her feel



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"excluded"! [According to](#) the lawsuit, Ahlquist has suffered all manner of terrible psychological torment because of the prayer.

Ahlquist, the lawsuit intones, "has observed the prayer at Cranston West on each occasion that she has participated in school programs in the Cranston West auditorium."

Moreover:

[She] does not subscribe to the religious expression conveyed by the prayer and objects to being subjected to it as a requirement of attending school and a condition of attending school programs in the auditorium.

[I]n observing the prayer in her school, [she] feels excluded, ostracized and devalued by her school because she does not share or agree with the religious expression conveyed by the prayer.

[Ahlquist] further considers and objects to the prayer as constituting and conveying government endorsement of religion and government endorsement of a particular religious viewpoint with which she does not agree.

Therefore, concludes Ahlquist and the ACLU, the banner trespasses her constitutional rights under the [First](#) and [Fourteenth](#) Amendments to the [U.S. Constitution](#).

Unsurprisingly, Ahlquist's father [is involved](#), and he "does not believe his daughter should be subjected to a religious communication and display with which she does not agree as a condition of attending public school."

Also unsurprisingly, the usual collection of clerics side with the enemies of religion.

Rev. Donald Anderson, "a Baptist pastor who graduated from Cranston West in 1966 and now heads the Rhode Island State Council of Churches," the [Providence Journal reports](#), says the banner was "was an attempt at being broader, but it was not broad enough."

Anderson and Rabbi Peter Stein of Temple Sinai in Cranston — who sat by Jessica during a Monday afternoon news conference to announce the suit — said the prayer banner has an "exclusionary effect" on those who are either not religious or hold different religious beliefs than those expressed on the banner. Anderson said it "crosses the line to state-sponsored religion," the very reason that brought Baptists, Quakers and other "religious dissidents" to Rhode Island in the first place, Anderson said.

Brown said a Cranston parent, whom he would not identify, complained to the ACLU in June after attending a school event at Cranston West. Several people, he said, have since called, objecting to the prayer display.

"The fact that there were no formal complaints in x number of years, it's not an indication that people don't care," Brown said. "It requires a great amount of courage to step forward."

The state's Catholic bishop said the banner itself doesn't mean much. [Writing in Rhode Island Catholic](#), his diocesan paper, Bishop [Thomas J. Tobin](#) said that winning the fight over the banner should not become the sole objective of its supporters. "On one hand ... I see absolutely no harm in having the banner remain in the school," [he wrote](#). "The banner certainly doesn't promote the establishment of any particular church or faith."

Tobin continued:



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The desire to scrub every reference to God and religious faith from public life, including our schools, is tiresome and irritating. And in fact it creates another pseudo-religion, secularism, that other people are forced to endure. The ACLU should avoid these silly little squabbles and move on to other more important issues where civil liberties are really threatened. By the way, does anyone know — does the ACLU ever support “conservative” causes, or just those that are part of the “liberal” agenda?

But I digress. In short, the prayer banner is a historic part of the school culture; it expresses positive sentiments and inspires students; it does far more good than harm. And although I don’t have a vote, I vote that it stays.

On the other hand . . . it seems to me that the rise and fall of religious faith, Christian or otherwise, in our nation or even in Cranston, doesn’t depend on the fate of the banner. If it has to be removed, so be it. Faith will survive and the free practice of religion will go on. And in fact, the banner battle can be an occasion for all of us to treasure the opportunities for personal prayer we already have, every day.

[According to](#) the *Providence Journal*, if the city loses the case, a similar banner at another school might also have to come down.

The ACLU [has long been](#) a legal torpedo for the radical left and communists in their quest to erase religion from public life in the United States.



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