



School Intimidated Into Dropping Daily “God Bless America” Declaration

A Pennsylvania elementary school principal has been forced to stop saying “God Bless America” over the school loudspeaker, thanks to the intimidation of an organization apparently committed to deleting First Amendment guaranteed religious expression from the public square.

Principal Peter Brigg was accustomed to declaring “God Bless America” after leading students and staff in a daily recitation of the Pledge of Allegiance at Sabold Elementary School in Springfield, Pennsylvania. But a parent supposedly complained to the Freedom From Religion Foundation (FFRF), which sent a [threatening letter](#) to the Springfield school district demanding that the practice be halted immediately.

Claiming that the phrase “God Bless America” originated with the patriotic Irving Berlin song made iconic by singer Kate Smith and amounted to a prayer, an FFRF attorney insisted to the district that a prayer “hosted by a publicly-supported school does not pass constitutional muster. The phrase ‘God Bless America,’ repeatedly uttered by a public school, amounts to a declaration of orthodoxy in religion that falsely equates patriotism with piety.”

The letter went on to demand that the school’s “practice of proclaiming ‘God Bless America’ each day must cease immediately,” and insisted that the district “inform us in writing” when it had followed through on the FFRF’s dictates.

In response to the frivolous and empty threat, the school district released a statement confirming that it had caved in to the FFRF and dropped “God Bless America,” explaining that “continuation of any practices that may be unlawful would only expose the District to litigation, which the local taxpayers would have to financially support.”

The district added that it had “not altered the recitation of the Pledge of Allegiance and has not prohibited students from deciding on their own, as their own form of self-expression, whether or not to state the words, ‘God Bless America’ (or any other appropriate form of self-expression) upon completing the Pledge of Allegiance.”

In its own statement an FFRF spokesman said that the group was “gratified that Springfield officials listened to us so clearly. Young elementary school children don’t need to be coerced into affirming God’s name every morning.”

However, the atheist-agnostic group added that it continues to be frustrated by its failure to force schools and others to drop “under God” from the Pledge of Allegiance. In its statement the FFRF





Written by [Dave Bohon](#) on May 18, 2019

lamented that it “receives constant complaints over the addition of ‘under God’ into the previously secular Pledge of Allegiance. The pledge was tampered with in 1954. Unfortunately, attempts to litigate this addition into the pledge, which equates piety with patriotism, have been unsuccessful.”

In reality there are a number of qualified public policy law firms that school districts can call on for legal help when facing such intimidation. Groups that have effectively defended First Amendment freedoms against groups such as the FFRF include the [American Center for Law and Justice](#), [Alliance Defending Freedom](#), the [Becket Fund for Religious Liberty](#), and [First Liberty Institute](#).

Jeremy Dys of First Liberty Institute said that he is troubled that many school districts are bullied by the empty threats of groups such as the FFRF. Dys told OneNewsNow.com: “If your school district gets that kind of a call, or gets that letter, it is very simple: Ignore it. It’s not worth the paper it’s written on.”

In an interview with Todd Starnes of Fox News, Dys said that “it’s hard to know which is more disturbing: that activists would claim ‘God Bless America’ violates the First Amendment, or school officials that surrender to this kind of bullying.”

Dys pointed out that “phrases like ‘God Bless America’ and ‘In God We Trust’ are as much a part of our history as ‘under God’ is a part of our Pledge of Allegiance — and the U.S. Constitution protects their use, on or off school property. What’s next? Will the Springfield School District fire teachers who say ‘God bless you’ to students who sneeze?”

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