



Written by [Dave Bohon](#) on September 16, 2011

ACLU Suing School District for Ten Commandments Display

The ACLU is targeting a Virginia school district for displaying the Ten Commandments in one of its high schools. “The American Civil Liberties Union of Virginia filed the lawsuit [September 13th] against Giles County School Board in U.S. District Court in Roanoke on behalf of an unidentified Narrows High School student and the student’s parent,” reported the Washington Post. “The lawsuit says the display unconstitutionally promotes a specific religious faith and serves no secular purpose.”



The ACLU is demanding that the Ten Commandments be removed from school walls and that the court impose a ban on any further biblical displays. According to [CBN News](#), “School board members voted in June to re-hang the biblical texts as part of a display that included other U.S. historical documents. More than 50 students had walked out of class in protest over the commandments removal earlier in the year.”

In addition to the Ten Commandments, the Foundations of American Law and Government display includes, among other historical documents, the Magna Carta, the Declaration of Independence, and the Mayflower Compact, along with an explanation of the importance of each document to America’s heritage of freedom.

In a [press release](#) covering the case, the ACLU complained that the Ten Commandments “is posted on a main hallway at the high school, near the trophy case and on the way to the cafeteria, where it can be seen by students every day. It is surrounded by historical documents relating to American history, such as the Declaration of Independence, the Star-Spangled Banner, and the Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom.”

The ACLU explained that the posting of the historic Judeo-Christian text makes one of the plaintiffs, referred to as “Doe 1” in the legal complaint, “feel like an outsider in his own school, because the school is endorsing religious beliefs to which he does not subscribe.” Similarly, his parent “Doe 2,” objects to the display “because it usurps the parent’s right to control the religious education of Doe 1.”

Kent Willis, executive director of the ACLU’s Virginia chapter, insisted that the Ten Commandments “were clearly placed in Giles County public schools to promote religion, and that violates the First Amendment of the Constitution. School board members cannot camouflage their religious purpose by hiding the Ten Commandments among other documents.”

Recalling the evolution of the case, the ACLU noted that over the years the district had allowed the posting of the Ten Commandments alongside a copy of the U.S. Constitution. But “after complaints from the Freedom From Religion Foundation last fall, the school superintendent ordered them taken down,” the secular group noted.



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That changed, however, when over 200 residents of the district demanded the restoration of the display, to which the school board enthusiastically complied. “Only after the ACLU and the Freedom From Religion Foundation threatened litigation did the school board reverse itself and order the Ten Commandments taken down again,” continued the ACLU. “Then, in June, the school board authorized the posting of the Ten Commandments with historical documents.” Thus far, Narrows High School is the only school displaying the religious document, though the ACLU’s challenge may well prompt a defiant response from the district.

“Schools best respect religious freedom when they allow students to express their religious beliefs, but refrain from expressing religious opinions of their own,” said Willis. “That is not what has happened here.”

The school district is being represented in the case by [Liberty Counsel](#), a successful conservative legal advocacy group connected with the [Liberty University School of Law](#) in Lynchburg, Virginia. Mathew Staver, founder of Liberty and dean of the law school, pointed out that the Ten Commandments are “universally recognized as a symbol of the law and are appropriate for display in schools, courthouses, and similar settings.” He added that their public display “is consistent with our nation’s history and with the First Amendment. There are more than 50 depictions of the Ten Commandments at the U.S. Supreme Court, and there have been thousands of displays throughout the country for many years.”

While the ACLU has pursued such cases in other states, mostly with unsuccessful results, “this is the first case of this nature I am aware of in Virginia,” said Staver “My obvious hope is that this case will be dismissed by the court. We don’t even know if this is a real family or a real person who is behind this case.”



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