

# FREEDOM FROM RELIGION *foundation*

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August 22, 2017

SENT VIA EMAIL & U.S. MAIL: [tdavidson@comanche.k12.ok.us](mailto:tdavidson@comanche.k12.ok.us)

Mr. Terry Davidson  
Superintendent  
Comanche Public Schools  
1030 Ash Avenue  
Comanche, OK 73529

Re: Unconstitutional Religious Display

Dear Superintendent Davidson:

I am writing on behalf of the Freedom From Religion Foundation (FFRF) regarding a constitutional violation occurring in Comanche Public Schools. We were contacted by a concerned local resident. FFRF is a national nonprofit organization with more than 29,000 members across the country, including members in Oklahoma. Our purposes are to protect the constitutional principle of separation between state and church, and to educate the public on matters relating to nontheism.

It is our understanding that there is a bible verse on display above the front desk at Comanche Elementary School. We understand that this display reads, "Welcome, The Lord bless you and keep you. Num. 6:24." Please see the enclosed photo.

The District violates the Constitution when its schools display religious symbols or messages. Public schools may not advance, prefer, or promote religion. *See Lee v. Weisman*, 505 U.S. 577 (1992); *Wallace v. Jaffree*, 472 U.S. 38 (1985); *Epperson v. Arkansas*, 393 U.S. 97 (1967); *Sch. Dist. of Abington Twp. v. Schempp*, 374 U.S. 203 (1963); *Engel v. Vitale*, 370 U.S. 421 (1962). This display violates this basic constitutional prohibition by creating the appearance that the District prefers religion over nonreligion.

Courts have continually held that school districts may not display religious messages or iconography in public schools. *See, e.g., Stone v. Graham*, 449 U.S. 39 (1980) (ruling that the Ten Commandments may not be displayed on classroom walls); *Lee v. York County*, 484 F.3d 689 (4th Cir. 2007) (ruling that a teacher may be barred from displaying religious messages on classroom bulletin boards); *Washegesic v. Bloomingdale Pub. Schs.*, 33 F. 3d 679 (6th Cir. 1994) (ruling that a painting of Jesus may not be displayed in a public school).

Religion is a divisive force in public schools. The Supreme Court has repeatedly noted that "[s]chool sponsorship of a religious message is impermissible because it sends the ancillary message to members of the audience who are nonadherents 'that they are outsiders, not full members of the political community, and an accompanying message to adherents that they are

insiders, favored members of the political community.” *Santa Fe Indep. Sch. Dist. v. Doe*, 530 U.S. 290, 309 (2000) (quoting *Lynch v. Donnelly*, 465 U.S. 668, 688 (1984) (O’Connor, J., concurring)). This message is particularly impermissible when it is presented to such young and impressionable students.

This religious display is particularly inappropriate given the pluralistic community that the District serves. Overall, 23 percent of Americans identify as nonreligious.<sup>1</sup> The display alienates those nonreligious students, families, teachers, and members of the public whose religious beliefs are inconsistent with the message being promoted by the school.

In recognition of the District’s constitutional obligation to remain neutral toward religion, please remove the bible verse from above the front desk of Comanche Elementary School. Please reply in writing with the steps you are taking to remedy this constitutional violation.

Sincerely,

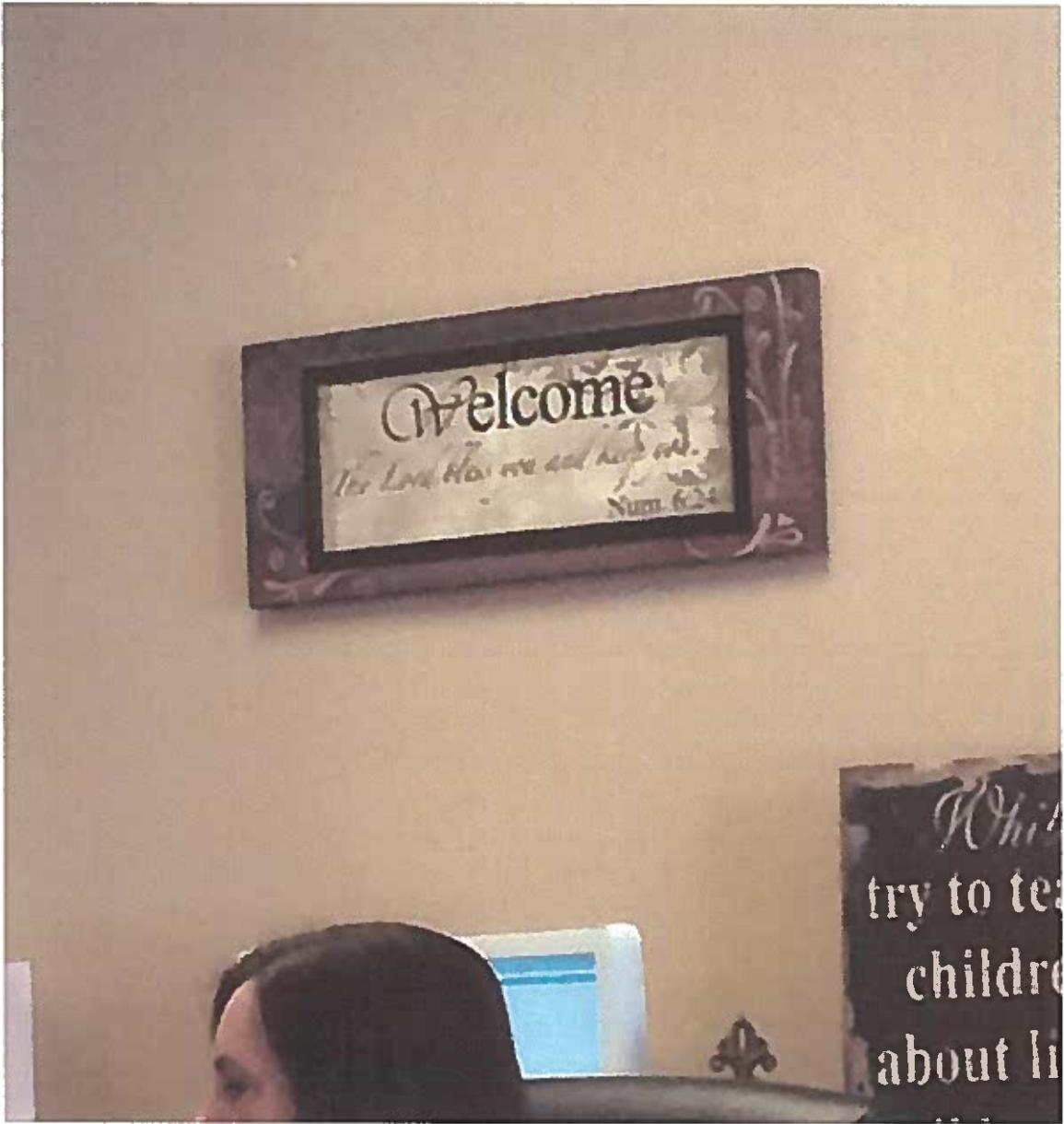


Christopher Line  
*Patrick O’Reiley Legal Fellow*  
*Freedom From Religion Foundation*

Enclosure

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<sup>1</sup> *America’s Changing Religious Landscape*, Pew Research Center (May 12, 2015), available at [www.pewforum.org/2015/05/12/americas-changing-religious-landscape/](http://www.pewforum.org/2015/05/12/americas-changing-religious-landscape/).



Welcome  
For Love Has no end and never fails.  
Num. 6:24

Why  
try to teach  
children  
about li