

# FREEDOM FROM RELIGION *foundation*

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March 30, 2015

**SENT VIA EMAIL & U.S. MAIL**

**jaynet@imschools.org**

Tom Jayne  
Superintendent  
Iron Mountain Public Schools  
217 Izzo-Mariucci Way  
Iron Mountain, MI 49801

Re: Religious Assembly in Public School

Dear Superintendent Jayne:

I am writing on behalf of the Freedom From Religion Foundation (FFRF) regarding a constitutional violation that occurred in Iron Mountain Public Schools. FFRF is a national nonprofit organization with more than 22,000 members across the country, including over 550 members in Michigan. Our purpose is to protect the constitutional principle of separation between state and church.

It is our understanding that on March 2, motivational speaker Bob Lenz spoke at Iron Mountain High School. We understand that Lenz is associated with Life Promotions, a religious group that seeks to convert young people to Christianity. While Lenz's presentation may have been secular, we understand he recruited students to come to an event at Cornerstone Community Church later that night. We are informed he handed out fliers to students advertising free pizza and a prize drawing and telling students to "Bring a friend!" Please find enclosed pictures of this flier.

Life Promotions' website makes clear its proselytizing agenda. The site explicitly states that the group "strive[s] to reach youth before the age of 18."<sup>1</sup> A promotional video claims that America's youth are experiencing a "spiritual poverty," lamenting that less than 18% of youth attend church regularly. "Two out of three people who begin their relationship with Christ and fill that spiritual void will do so before they're 18," says the video, assuring watchers, "We can reach them before it's too late."<sup>2</sup> It also touts that Bob Lenz travels the country "sharing life principles and the love of Jesus, offering hope for this life and the next."

It is inappropriate to take away instructional time from students to expose them to a proselytizing speaker, regardless of any secular message the group claims to be promoting. It is well settled that public schools may not advance or promote religion. *See generally, Lee v. Weisman*, 505 U.S. 577 (1992); *Wallace v. Jaffree*, 472 U.S. 38 (1985); *Epperson v. Ark.*, 393 U.S. 97 (1967);

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.lifepromotions.org/who-we-are/our-mission/>

<sup>2</sup> [https://www.youtube.com/watch?t=11&v=\\_4G1i-buV2M](https://www.youtube.com/watch?t=11&v=_4G1i-buV2M)

*Sch. Dist. of Abington Twp. v. Schempp*, 374 U.S. 203 (1963); *Engel v. Vitale*, 370 U.S. 421 (1962).

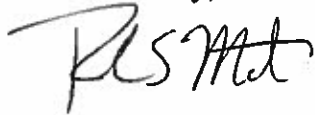
Moreover, “the preservation and transmission of religious beliefs and worship is a responsibility and a choice committed to the private sphere.” *Santa Fe Indep. Sch. Dist. v. Doe*, 530 U.S. 290, 310 (2000) (quoting *Lee*, 505 U.S. at 589). In *Lee*, the Supreme Court extended the prohibition of school sponsored religious activities beyond the classroom to all school functions, holding prayers at public high school graduations an impermissible establishment of religion. Thus, recruitment for religious programming as part of a school assembly is in violation of the Establishment Clause.

Students are a vulnerable and captive audience, and Iron Mountain High School allowed Lenz to take advantage of the students’ captivity to recruit them to come to a Christian event later that night. This “[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*, 530 U.S. at 309-10 (quoting *Lynch v. Donnelly*, 465 U.S. 668, 688 (1984) (O’Connor, J., concurring)).

We are aware that some Christian missionaries insinuate themselves into public schools by camouflaging their purposes. It is incumbent that public officials do due diligence when approached by outside groups with vested interests in pitching their messages to a captive audience of public school students. However, in this case, it would have taken only a cursory glance at Life Promotions’ website to verify its religious agenda. It is difficult for us to understand how this event could have been approved. Your community possesses many secular experts who have experience, training, certification, and/or degrees and would be delighted, usually at no cost to the District, to discuss “a positive message of hope and encouragement” before your student body, and whose presence would not raise constitutional red flags.

We request that Iron Mountain Public Schools refrain from sponsoring inappropriate and unconstitutional assemblies in the future, and that you ensure no future assemblies from outside groups contain an underlying proselytizing message or agenda. Speakers must not be permitted to recruit public school students for religious events. Please notify us in writing of the steps you take to ensure this constitutional violation does not recur.

Sincerely,



Rebecca S. Markert  
Staff Attorney

RSM:mez

Enclosure

**FREE PIZZA!  
BRING A FRIEND!**

**BOB LENZ**  
International Speaker

**DIGNITY  
REVOLUTION**

*standing under the  
value of freedom*

**Monday, March 2, 7:00pm**  
Cornerstone Community Church  
617 Stephenson Ave  
Iron Mountain, MI



*With AJ the  
Animated  
Illusionist*

**COMPLETE THIS SIDE FOR A CHANCE TO WIN!** Drawing will be held following the presentation. Winner will be announced or notified.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ ST \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail \_\_\_\_\_

Birth Year: \_\_\_\_\_