

FREEDOM FROM RELIGION *foundation*

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Sent via U.S. Mail and Email: dmcminim@jeffco.k12.co.us

Mr. Dan McMinimee
Superintendent, Jeffco Public Schools
1829 Denver West Drive #27
Golden, Colorado 80401

Re: Inappropriate Religious Mascot

Dear Mr. McMinimee:

I am writing on behalf of the Freedom From Religion Foundation to object to a religious mascot at a Jeffco Public School. We received a complaint from a concerned district family. FFRF is a nationwide nonprofit organization with over 23,000 members across the country, including nearly 700 in Colorado and a local chapter, Colorado Springs Chapter. Our purpose is to protect the constitutional principle of separation between state and church.

It is our understanding that the Ken Caryl Middle School mascot is “The Crusaders.” KCMS depicts the mascot as a cloaked knight holding a shield and sword. There are red Latin crosses on both the knight’s tunic and his shield. Please see the enclosed screenshot. A white mantle with a red cross is the unmistakable attire of a member of the Knights Templar. The Knights Templar, originally known as Poor Fellow-Soldiers of Christ and of the Temple of Solomon, were among the most feared fighting units of the Crusades.

While the Crusaders, and specifically the Knights Templar, were certainly a terrifying group of Christian warriors capable of striking fear in their enemies, they are not an appropriate mascot for a public middle school. The Crusaders were Christian warriors fighting against “infidels” and “heathens” to reclaim the Christian Holy Land for their Christian god. The Latin crosses drive this religious message home. The district should change this religious mascot to something more inclusive and appropriate for a public school.

The religious nature of the mascot, its historical context, and the two Latin crosses, make the conclusion unavoidable—the mascot is religious and the school unconstitutionally is endorsing religion over nonreligion. The government, including public schools, is prohibited from endorsing religion over nonreligion just as it is prohibited from endorsing one religious sect over another. The Supreme Court has driven this point home repeatedly. The First Amendment “requires the state to be neutral in its relations with groups of religious believers and non-believers.” *Everson v. Bd. of Educ. of Ewing*, 330 U.S. 1, 18 (1947). In *Schempp*, the Court wrote “[t]he fullest realization of true religious liberty requires that government ... **effect no favoritism among sects or between religion and nonreligion.**” *Sch. Dist. of Abington Twp. v. Schempp*, 374 U.S. 203, 305 (1963) (Goldberg, J., concurring).

The religious significance of the Crusader's Latin crosses is unambiguous and indisputable. "The Latin cross... is the principal symbol of Christianity around the world, and display of the cross alone could not reasonably be taken to have any secular point." *Capitol Square Review and Advisory Bd. v. Pinette*, 515 U.S. 753, 792 (1995)(Souter, J., concurring). An overwhelming majority of federal courts agree that the Latin cross represents only the Christian religion. See, e.g., *Separation of Church and State Comm. v. City of Eugene*, 93 F.3d 617, 620 (9th Cir. 1996)("There is no question that the Latin cross is a symbol of Christianity, and that [it] ...violates the Establishment Clause") *Harris v. Zion*, 927 F.2d 1401, 1412 (7th Cir. 1991)("a Latin cross...endorses or promotes a particular religious faith. It expresses an unambiguous choice in favor of Christianity.") *cert. denied*, 505 U.S. 1218 (1992); *ACLU of Ill. v. St. Charles*, 794 F.2d 265, 271 (7th Cir. 1986)("...the cross dramatically conveys a message of governmental support for Christianity, whatever the intentions of those responsible for the display may be. Such a display is not only religious but sectarian.") *cert. denied*, 479 U.S. 961 (1986).

Standing alone, the Crusader's crosses are an unconstitutional endorsement of religion when paired with the religious mascot and the historical context, the endorsement is exacerbated.

The selection of a group of Christian warriors is not only legally problematic, but also highly inappropriate for a middle school. It does no good to claim this mascot was chosen for historical reasons. The Crusades were an incredibly violent undertaking, even by medieval standards—hardly the appropriate choice for a middle school mascot.

Schools should not celebrate the zealous warriors who slaughtered Jews, Muslims, and even Christians in the name of their god. The Crusades ultimately proved to be a disastrous failure as the whole of Eastern Christendom ended up under Muslim rule and "[t]he bitterness that was generated between the Christian West and the Muslim Levant was so great that its effects rumbled down the centuries and echo to the present day."¹

Universities and organizations all over the country are removing references to the Crusades from their names in order to be more welcoming and less hostile to non-Christians. Susquehanna University in Pennsylvania recently dropped the "Crusaders" name and mascot despite using it for almost 100 years. SU made this change to be more sensitive and inclusive of non-Christian, even though the name did not originally refer to the Christian Crusades.²

Even Christian schools and organizations are acknowledging the inappropriateness of the name "Crusaders." In 2000, Wheaton College voluntarily changed its "Crusader" mascot because the image of a crusader carries many negative connotations and is the wrong symbol for a suburban school.³ In 2014, a Christian college in Wisconsin dropped its "Crusaders" name after nearly 50 years, claiming that the moniker has become outdated.⁴ In 2011, Campus Crusade for Christ, one

¹ James McDonald, *Crusades and Crusaders*, Medieval Warfare, (October 1, 2010), <http://www.medievalwarfare.info/crusades.htm>.

² Justin Engle, *Susquehanna will replace 'Crusader' nickname*, The Daily Item, (October 27, 2015), http://www.dailyitem.com/news/susquehanna-will-replace-crusader-nickname/article_a278e70a-7ca3-11e5-ba78-1358a3126d2f.html.

³ LeAnn Spencer, *Go Cherubs? Wheaton School Rethinks Mascot*, The Chicago Tribune, (April 25, 2000) http://articles.chicagotribune.com/2000-04-25/news/0004250110_1_crusader-new-school-mascot-holy-land.

⁴ *MBU Drops 'Crusaders' Nickname to Adapt To Global Society*, University Herald, (February 3, 2014), <http://www.universityherald.com/articles/7245/20140203/mbu-crusaders-nickname-global-society-maranatha-baptist-university-christian-college-watertown.htm>.

of America's largest evangelical organizations changed its name to Cru, partially to avoid the negative connotation of the historical Crusades.⁵

We recognize that changing a school mascot is not an easy process and there will be some backlash to the change, but to comply with the law, the school must select a new mascot. The selection of a new mascot can provide a great opportunity for students and the community to work together to be active participants in the selection process. We humbly suggest the expedient solution: removing the crosses and using "The Knights." Please inform us in writing of the steps you are taking to resolve this matter.

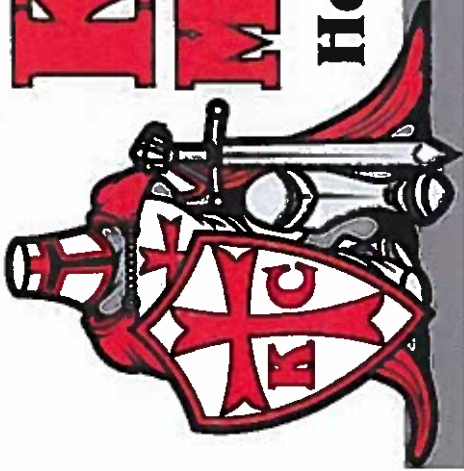
Sincerely,



Andrew L. Seidel
Staff Attorney

ALS:cal

⁵ Sarah Pulliam Bailey, *Campus Crusade Changes Name to Cru*, Christianity Today, (July 19, 2011), <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2011/julyweb-only/campus-crusade-name-change.html>.



KEN CARYL **Middle School**

Home of the Crusaders

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