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Christopher Line
Freedom From Religion Foundation
P.O. Box 750
Madison, Wisconsin 53701

Re: Multiple religious issues

Dear Mr. Line:

I am in receipt of your communications to Superintendent of Schools, Denia Reese, alleging multiple religious violations. The issues, as I know them involve the inadvertent distribution of religious materials in backpacks at Graysville Elementary School, the placement of religious signs at Cloud Springs Elementary School (CPL), and religious communications between staff members at CPL.

With regards to the distribution of religious materials in the backpacks (bags), it appears that the facts are that back packs were donated to the school by several predominantly Baptist churches in the local community many months ago. These bags remained in a storage room for an extended period of months. Before they were given to students, personnel at GES visually reviewed the exterior of the bags, looking only at the outside of the bags, which appeared to be empty. The bags were physically pressed or flattened to reaffirm the empty external appearance; this was accomplished by tactile touch by hand by flattening out the bags. Since all of these reviews gave the appearance of the bags being empty, the school employees thought that nothing was in them. However, that review was mistaken because they did not unzip the bags and look inside. Although it was unknown to the school officials, apparently some or all of them contained one piece of paper or a few pieces of paper, which were not noticed by the employees. After giving them (or some of them) away, the school was notified by a recipient(s) that the religious enclosures (listing names and addresses of churches or similar notations) were present. The school has been instructed to physically view the inside of any bags or similar items and to remove religious endorsements before giving them to any other students.

The District also agrees that the signs at Cloud Springs Elementary School are probably inappropriate and that they should be removed. The communications between teachers are another matter, as these does not involve younger-aged impressionable children, and some of them were solely between staff members, which involves another constitutional issue, which is the writer's First Amendment right of free speech. The District agrees that labeling all communications with letterhead or footnote type slogans such as "In His Name" or repetitive religious messages would not be appropriate because in alia, many of these

would likely be distributed to much of the general public, so the school has been notified to remove those.

However, the District strongly disagrees that the email which requests personal prayers for a teacher's parent is inappropriate. This email was sent by a staff member to other staff members; no one was required to engage in any religious activity; no students were involved in this message; and it was sent after school hours. The fact that it was sent on the school system's internet email platform was, at best, incidental to the obvious personal nature of the communication. Many personal communications are sent on the District's internet email system from one teacher to other staff after school hours. Certainly, no one would have taken that message as constituting an imprimatur of the school or of the District. The email itself indicates that it is personal in nature. The District is not in the business of interfering with the First Amendment rights of its employee-speakers in after-hours private communications between staff members unless they are so intertwined with the District's business that a reader would gain the impression that the message was an endorsement of a religious message by the school or the District. Certainly, if this were to be expanded to the level of a prayer meeting or proselytization, then the District would agree with your position. However, the District does not believe that this after-hours email to other staff members requesting prayers for a sick family member was a proselytization, an intertwining between religion and governmental action, or an endorsement of religious activities by the District and it does not intend to interfere with the First Amendment rights of its employee-speakers/writers who incidentally use the platform in this manner.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me.

Thank you,



Renzo S. Wiggins, Attorney for the Catoosa County School District