

FREEDOM FROM RELIGION *foundation*

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April 26, 2023

SENT VIA FAX & U.S. MAIL: 801-402-5249

Liz Mumford
President, Board of Education
Davis School District
45 E. State St
P.O. Box 588
Farmington, UT 84025

Re: Removal of the bible from Davis School District

Dear President Mumford and Board of Education members:

I am writing on behalf of the Freedom From Religion Foundation (FFRF) to support the anonymous parent who has asked that the bible be removed from school libraries under §53G-10-103 of the Utah Code, and to refute the letter you received from First Liberty suggesting it would be unconstitutional for the district to remove the bible despite its pornographic and indecent content. FFRF is a national nonprofit organization with more than 40,000 members across the country, including many members in Utah. 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 in December, a district parent asked that the district ban the bible as part of its review of “sensitive materials” under a recently passed law, “Sensitive Materials in Schools” (Utah Code § 53G-10-103)¹, which prohibits books containing “pornographic or indecent material” as defined in the Utah State Code. The parent noted correctly that the bible contains “inappropriate and pornographic” material. We understand that so far, 81 books have been reviewed by the district’s committee, resulting in the removal of 33 books and the retention of about 30 after review. Among those removed was “The Bluest Eye,” by Toni Morrison, which tells the story of Pecola Breedlove, a young Black girl growing up in Ohio during the Great Depression. The novel sensitively tackles issues such as racism, incest and other child sexual abuse.² This and the other 32 books removed so far appear to contain far less “objectionable” material than the bible, which insensitively tackles issues such as racism, incest and sexual abuse. The parent rightly noted in their petition that, “If the books that have been banned so far are any indication for way lesser offenses, [the bible] should be a slam dunk.” We agree. The district must enforce the law equally and may not extend a “get out of jail free card” to books in violation of the law simply because they are religious.

¹<https://le.utah.gov/xcode/Title53G/Chapter10/53G-10-S103.html>

²<https://kutv.com/news/crisis-in-the-classroom/davis-school-district-bans-nobel-prize-winning-book-the-bluest-eye-from-all-libraries-toni-morrison-banned-books-law-utah>

On April 24, 2023, First Liberty sent a letter to Belinda Kuck and the Sensitive Materials Review Committee, urging the district to retain the bible in the district's libraries and claiming that removing it presents "serious constitutional concerns." In its letter, First Liberty touts the "serious value" the bible has for minors, while ignoring all of the sexually explicit descriptions, passages and themes contained within it, far exceeding such alleged references in many of the books the district has so egregiously banned. The suggestion to analyze and focus on the work as a whole and its value to students is a serious departure from the way the committee has analyzed the 33 removed books, which has involved nitpicking individual passages with no regard to literature, value as a whole to students or context.

In the bible, rape is not only described, but the victims are forced to marry their rapists.³ One bible story tells of a prostitute who "lusted after her lovers, whose genitals were like those of donkeys and whose emission was like that of horses," who "longed for the lewdness of your youth, when . . . [her] bosom was caressed and your young breasts fondled."⁴ This same story speaks about sex toys: you "took the fine jewelry I gave you, the jewelry made of my gold and silver, and you made for yourself male idols and engaged in prostitution with them."⁵ Another book of the bible has a character who prays, "may her breasts satisfy you always, may you ever be intoxicated with her love."⁶ In yet another bible story, a future husband purchases a wife by killing 200 of her fathers' enemies, mutilating their corpses, and bringing back their foreskins as a dowry.⁷ Another sordid and preposterous story that defames incest victims recounts the exploits of two daughters who, having just witnessed a genocide and the murder of their mother by a pyromaniacal god, supposedly got their father drunk and seduced him in order to bear his children.⁸ Yet another book describes sperm, intercourse, menstruation, homosexuality, bestiality, adultery and whores.⁹ Another depicts a holy man impaling a woman through her belly and describes in loving detail how to steal and rape virgins as war booty.¹⁰ Yet another tale tells how a woman has her hand cut off for touching a man's penis.¹¹ In other passages, women's skirts are lifted over their face so their nakedness and shame can be exposed to all.¹² Another tale describes a man touching a woman's "hole of the door" and how her "bowels were moved for him."¹³

These and many more unpalatable and sexually explicit stories are found in the various books of the bible. Our educational association has published a brochure, *An X-Rated Book: Sex & Obscenity In the Bible*, which exposes nearly 150 bible verses displaying a "pornographic view

³ Deuteronomy 22:28–29.

⁴ Ezekiel 23:20–21.

⁵ Ezekiel 16:17.

⁶ Proverbs 5:19.

⁷ 1 Samuel 18:27.

⁸ Genesis 19.

⁹ Leviticus.

¹⁰ Numbers.

¹¹ Deuteronomy 25:11–12.

¹² Nahum 3:5.

¹³ Song of Solomon 5:4.

of sex and women, lewdness, depravity and sexual violence often ordered or countenanced by the biblical deity.” It can be read for free on our website.¹⁴

FFRF Co-President Dan Barker has written an entire book on the evils of the bible, *GOD: The Most Unpleasant Character in All Fiction*. Chapters document “divinely” ordered genocide, infanticide and filicide, among many other atrocities, as well as the biblical deity’s racism, sexism, slavemongering and sadomasochism. An interactive companion website details all of this and more.¹⁵ These verses are one reason why FFRF makes available bible warning labels to place on hotel bibles saying, “Warning: Literal belief in this book may endanger your health and life.”¹⁶

The bible historically is doubtless the single-most weaponized piece of writing on the planet, responsible for unjust wars, genocide, anti-semitism, violent extremism, subjugation of women and pervasive racism. Throughout the Crusades, the Inquisition, the witch hunts, chattel slavery, the Holocaust, and the history of homophobia, the bible looms large. As Born Again Skeptic’s Guide to the Bible¹⁷ author Ruth Hurmence Green eloquently put it, “There was a time when religion ruled the world. It is known as the Dark Ages.”

First Liberty erroneously claims that removal of the bible would “constitute hostility toward Christianity.” It argues that removing the bible while leaving the Book of Mormon, the Torah and the Quran would be unconstitutional hostility towards Christianity, but this is not true. Parents are free to challenge these books as well and subject them to the same standards of review that require the removal of the bible. The district must hold religious texts to the same standards it holds all other library books, review them, and, if they contain the same inappropriate content as the bible, must also remove them under the district’s standards. As First Liberty helpfully points out, the Torah contains much of the same disturbing content as the bible and would certainly qualify to be removed as well. Removing the bible for its obscenity or graphic sexual content based on neutral criteria is not religious discrimination and First Liberty’s specious concerns can easily be alleviated.

FFRF advocates, above all, for freedom of thought. We oppose the concept of banning books from school libraries. We believe that there is no true freedom of thought, conscience or even religion, unless our government and its public schools are free from religion and its control over thought. We are deeply familiar with the haunting history of censorship—from the Catholic Church’s Index Librorum Prohibitorum, to the Comstock laws, to the Nazi book burnings, the attacks on authors such as Charles Darwin and Salman Rushdie, and the murders of Bangladeshi bloggers such as Avijit Roy. Heinrich Heine famously observed, “Where they burn books, they will end in burning human beings.” History never looks kindly on book censors and burners.

The best solution is to leave a diversity of viewpoints in school libraries, and trust students to explore complex topics themselves. However, so long as the district is interpreting Utah law as

¹⁴ Available at [ffrf.org/component/k2/item/23733-an-x-rated-book-sex-obscenity-in-the-bible](https://shop.ffrf.org/component/k2/item/23733-an-x-rated-book-sex-obscenity-in-the-bible).

¹⁵ Available at [unpleasant.ffrf.org/](https://shop.ffrf.org/unpleasant).

¹⁶ Available at [ffrf.org/shop/accessories/bumper-stickers-15/bible-warning-labels-skull-crossbones-78-detail](https://shop.ffrf.org/shop/accessories/bumper-stickers-15/bible-warning-labels-skull-crossbones-78-detail).

¹⁷ <https://shop.ffrf.org/product/born-again-skeptics-guide-to-the-bible/>

requiring it to remove any books containing sexual content, the bible may not be given special treatment and under the law your district is enforcing, it must be removed too.

The “inappropriate” sections of the dozens of books already removed, and many of the unresolved challenges you’re debating, are mainly minor parts of books that have much higher literary value. Reading takes time, and understanding books critically takes even more thought. Those who propose book bans target gullible audiences with selective material. They fear free inquiry and independence of thought. Much of the book banning impetus is manufactured, with pre-made lists of books and quotes circulated by self-righteous grandstanders who are hostile to critical thinking. In short, the current wave of book banning is not about protecting children, it is about discouraging thought.

We are disturbed by this law in Utah and the effect it has had in removing many important books from school libraries based on content taken out of context. Because Utah’s law requires the removal of “inappropriate material,” and you have set a standard for inappropriate content that clearly encompasses the sexually explicit materials contained in the bible, so long as the other books you have banned remain unavailable, you must be even-handed about your purge and immediately remove the bible as well. If you find that the vast amount of sexually explicit material in the bible does not warrant its removal from district schools, then this same lower standard must be applied to all of the books with much less objectionable content that you have already banned, and they must be returned to library shelves. Then your district should turn its energies to lobbying the state legislature to repeal its misguided book ban, which is creating so much chaos and censorship.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Chris Line". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Christopher Line
Staff Attorney
Freedom From Religion Foundation

Cc: Belinda Kuck, Sensitive Materials Review Committee