

# FREEDOM FROM RELIGION *foundation*

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

Re: Bibles need to be removed from Davis School District high schools and all bibles from lower grades under Board practice and policy

Dear President Mumford and Board of Education Members:

I am writing again on behalf of the Freedom From Religion Foundation (FFRF) regarding the District's decision to remove the King James version of the bible from its elementary and middle schools, but not its high schools This is a followup of our April 26, 2023 letter.<sup>1</sup>

It is our understanding that in response to the parent's request that we supported in our April 26, 2023 letter, the District has removed the King James version of the bible from all elementary and middle schools. This removal is appropriate under your current policies, but inadequate.

We understand, however, that the bible was not found to violate Utah's new law regarding "sensitive materials," but was removed from elementary and middle schools because it was age inappropriate. We also understand the District's decision has been appealed and it will be reconsidering whether to allow the bible in its schools, and that a request also has been made to remove the Book of Mormon.

Despite the graphic sexual material contained in the bible, which was submitted to the District by a parent, and reiterated in our letter, the panel concluded:

The district review committee reviewed the book in its entirety and determined that the book does not contain sensitive material as defined in Utah Code § 76-10-1227, § 76-10-1201, or § 76-10-1203. Therefore, according to Utah law, the book has been retained in school library circulation.

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<sup>1</sup> FFRF letter to Davis School District, April 26, 2023:  
<https://ffrf.org/uploads/legal/DavisSchoolDistrictUT.pdf>

This determination is clearly erroneous as the bible contains more sexual material than many other books that have been found to contain “sensitive material” and to violate the law.<sup>2</sup> Despite the erroneous determination, the committee nonetheless banned the bible in the District’s elementary and middle schools, recognizing how inappropriate the material is for young students.

It is also our understanding that only the King James version of the bible has been removed, and other versions continue to be allowed throughout the District, which means the District remains in violation of its interpretation and practices regarding HB 374, banning any books. Our concern remains in this instance that the bible is being treated preferentially simply because it is a favored religious book.

We therefore write to request that the District not only stand by its decision to remove the King James bible from its elementary and middle schools, but that it remove all versions of the bible from all of its schools and officially recognize that the graphic sexual material found in the bible does indeed constitute “sensitive material” based on the fact that other books with less graphic and sexual material have been found to violate the law, including *All Boys Aren’t Blue* and *Looking for Alaska*. As Thomas Paine wrote in *The Age of Reason*: “Whenever we read the obscene stories, the voluptuous debaucheries, the cruel and torturous executions, the unrelenting vindictiveness, with which more than half the Bible is filled, it would be more consistent that we called it the word of a demon, than the word of God. It is a history of wickedness that has served to corrupt and brutalize mankind; and, for my part, I sincerely detest it, as I detest everything that is cruel.”

When considering whether to ban or allow a book, the committee is supposed to base its determinations on a complex set of criteria that includes the overall purpose and educational significance, compliance with Utah Code Ann. §53G-10-103, age and developmental appropriateness, artistic or literary quality and system, materials which strengthen students’ sense of being part of a world community, materials which explore historical events and ethnic diversity, materials which promote a love of reading for life-long learning, and materials which include a variety of formats and genres and meet multiple reading purposes (enjoyment,

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<sup>2</sup> Here’s just a partial list of sexually explicit bible verses: **GENESIS** 4:19; 12:13–19; 16:2–4; 17:9–14; 19:1–8; 20:2–12; in 20:12 22:24; 24:2–3,9; 25:1–6; Ch. 29–30; 30:3; 30:9; 32:25; 34:25; 35:22; 38:8–10; 38:12–30 ; 39:7–20; 47:29. **EXODUS** 4:25; 20:26; 21:7–11; 21:10; 22:19. **LEVITICUS** 12:1–8; 15:16–18; 15:19–33; 4 15:29–30; 18:22; 18:23; 19:20–22; 20:10; 20:13; 20:15–16; 21:9 26:29. **NUMBERS** 25:4; 25:6–8; 31:17–18. **DEUTERONOMY** 21:10–14; 22:5; ; 22:23–26; 23:1; 23:2; 23:10–11; 23:12–14; 25:5–10; 25:11–12; 28:27; 28:30. **JUDGES** Ch. 11; 5 14:20; 16:1; 16:4–1; 19:1–30; 21:6–25 **RUTH** 3:6–9. **I SAMUEL** 2:8; 2:22–235:9–12; 6:1–5;18:25–27; 25:22,34. **II SAMUEL** 3:7; 1:1–27;12:11–12;5:13; 16:20–22; 20:3. **I KINGS** 1:1–4; 11: 14:10; 16:11, 21:21. **II KINGS** 9:8; 6 9:30–37; 23:7. **I CHRONICLES** 1:32–33. **II CHRONICLES** 11:21. **ESTHER** Ch.1–2; 1:11. **PSALMS** 45:10–17. **PROVERBS** 5:3; 7:5–27; 30:20. **SONG OF SOLOMON** 5:4; 8:8. **ISAIAH** 9:20; 14:21–22; 16:11; 6:12. **JEREMIAH** 13:25–26;16:4. **LAMENTATIONS** 2:19–20; 7 4:10. **EZEKIEL** 4:12–15;5:8–10; 8:2; 6:15; 6:36–37; 23:1–40; Ch. 24; 29:7–8. **HOSEA** 1:2–11; 2:1–15. **NAHUM** 3:4–6. **MALACHI** 2:1–4. **MATTHEW** 5:27–30; 5:31–32, 19:12; 22:24. **ACTS** 16:3. **ROMANS** 1:26–32. **I CORINTHIANS** 6:18–20; 7:1–40. **I TIMOTHY** 3:2,12. **REVELATION** 17:1–16.

acquisition of knowledge, answering questions and personal growth). Despite this robust criteria, the committee's decisions appear to follow a pattern of banning books based on a small portion of sexual material, ignoring all other aspects of the work. The majority of books being banned by the District are the same books that have been circulated by a small group of extremist, conservative activists working to disproportionately remove LGBTQ books or books by Black, Indigenous or People of Color authors from schools, among others.

“Milk and Honey,” by Rupi Kaur, a number one New York Times bestseller, has been banned in your District. It is in part about surviving sexual abuse at a young age (the title is a biblical reference, by the way) and learning how to heal emotionally and sexually from such abuse. Thirteen percent of Utahns report being molested before the age of 18 and one-third assaulted before their 10th birthday.<sup>3</sup> This is a book whose “sensitive material” may help many of your students. Contrast this with the warped family values in the bible, which remains on high school shelves, and its slander about incest, depicting virgins daughters contriving to seduce their father, “Righteous” Lot (Genesis 19:1–11), a story that has surely blighted many young lives.

The “inappropriate” sections of the books the District has been removing are mainly minor passages from books with high literary value. As we wrote you previously, book banners fear free inquiry and independence of thought. Many of the book banning agitators use a pre-made list of books and quotes circulated by self-righteous grandstanders hostile to critical thinking. The current wave of book banning is not about protecting children, rather it is about discouraging thought, and the District need not take part in that destructive effort.

In fact, it seems clear from the books that have been removed that it isn't language, or graphic descriptions, that determines whether a book might be removed. It's that these books might inspire the reader to engage in critical thinking, such as about the Bronze Age morality in play when the bible itself was written.

There are untold thousands of classic, valuable works of literature that are at risk or will inevitably be banned by the District. Many books contain small portions of sexual content, but that does not detract from the value they provide for students, and in many cases, it enhances that value. For example, *The Color Purple* by Alice Walker is a beautiful portrait of sisterhood, hope and resilience in the face of personal pain, struggle and domestic and sexual abuse. But, in order to paint that portrait, it must necessarily discuss sexually explicit topics. Will this be banned next?

A renowned classic, *The Catcher in the Rye* is about 16-year-old Holden Caulfield and his struggle to remain protected in his childhood innocence. A complex novel about one boy's struggle to leave his childhood behind, it is a heart-wrenching, poignant story that incidentally includes some sexual content and thus is likely at risk of being banned by the District, ignoring its long-enduring literary value as a classic.

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<sup>3</sup> Child Sexual Abuse Statistics, Utah, Utah Women & Leadership Project: <https://le.utah.gov/interim/2022/pdf/00001784.pdf>

The wisest course is to ensure a diversity of viewpoints in school libraries, which allows students the freedom to explore diverging viewpoints by themselves. Since the District has entered into the dangerous folly of evaluating and banning books, it must be even handed and evaluate the bible under the same standards it has been using to ban other books with sexual or graphic content. The committee's decision to give a pass to the bible in high school and to non-King James versions in lower grades was discriminatory and erroneous. The District must correct this content-based discrimination giving a preference to a religious book. Under your criteria, you must ban all versions of the bible from District schools, as well as any other religious books, including the Book of Mormon, that similarly violate the law as it has been applied by the District. If you confirm 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.

As we expressed in our earlier letter, FFRF advocates, above all, for freedom of thought. We oppose banning books from school libraries. Under our First Amendment, the District has an obligation to ensure true freedom of thought and conscience. As Isaac Asimov wrote, "Any book worth banning is a book worth reading."

We continue to be disturbed by this unconstitutional and vague law in Utah and the effect it has had in removing many important books from school libraries based on content taken out of context. Unfortunately, you have set a standard and precedent for the removal of "inappropriate material" that clearly encompasses the sexually explicit materials contained in the bible. Under your sensitive materials review practices, the bible clearly contains "sensitive material defined in Utah Code § 76-10-1227" and has "no serious value for minors." So long as the other books you have banned remain unavailable, you must be even-handed about your purge and all versions of the bible must be removed post-haste from all District schools. May we hear from you at the earliest convenience about our formal complaint?

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Chris Line". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Christopher Line  
Staff Attorney  
Freedom From Religion Foundation

Cc: Belinda Kuck, Sensitive Materials Review Committee