

# 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: Apply your new standard to all challenged books in the District and return them to school shelves

Dear President Mumford and Board of Education Members:

I am writing on behalf of the Freedom From Religion Foundation (FFRF) regarding the District's decision to restore the King James Bible to elementary and middle school libraries despite the vast amount of sexual, violent and vulgar content it contains.

It is our understanding that after countless attacks by some state lawmakers and threats by community members, the Board has unanimously voted to reverse the neutral decision rendered by a parent-led committee to remove the King James Bible from elementary and middle schools. Unfortunately, this privileges Christianity and the Christian viewpoint.<sup>1</sup>

The initial committee correctly evaluated the bible under the same standards that it had other books and found that its overt sexual and violent content was inappropriate for young children. Under pressure, the District has now decided that the bible should receive special treatment and remain in all district schools while many books with less sexual and violent content remain banned. The District has found that the bible "has significant, serious value for minors which outweighs the violent or vulgar content it contains," but it ignores this standard for all other books which are deemed inappropriate if they contain any sexual content but do not advance a Judeo-Christian viewpoint.

As we detailed in our previous letters, the bible contains far more sexual material than many other books that have been found to contain "sensitive material" and to violate the law.<sup>2</sup> We

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.sltrib.com/news/education/2023/06/20/utah-school-district-votes-return/>

<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

previously urged that the bible be removed from all schools in order to meet the standard of review the District had been applying to the books it was reviewing. Rather than correcting its mistake and applying the standard in a neutral manner, the District has doubled down on its viewpoint censorship by applying a different standard for the bible.

The District must apply a neutral standard in order to rectify this situation and not violate the constitutional rights of its students by selectively banning certain viewpoints while allowing others. Either the bible must be banned under the standard that has been applied to all non-Christian/religious content, or the books which have been banned under a stricter criteria than has been applied to the bible must be restored to school libraries.

When considering whether to ban or allow a book, the committee must 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, acquisition of knowledge, answering questions and personal growth). Despite this robust criteria, the committee's decisions appear to follow a pattern of cherry-picking: 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 authors who are Black, Indigenous or People of Color from schools, or seem critical of religious authoritarianism, among others. The bible has clearly not been evaluated under the same criteria as these other books.

The bible's sexual content has been deemed permissible because of the religious viewpoint it advances, while books like "Milk and Honey," by Rupi Kaur, remain banned in the District. It is in part about surviving sexual abuse at a young age and learning how to heal emotionally and sexually from such abuse. It is hard to see how this book does not have "significant, serious value for minors which outweighs the violent or vulgar content it contains" when the bible supposedly does. The same is true for Toni Morrison's "The Bluest Eye," a significant and highly empathic work of American fiction about a Black girl, age 11, who is raped and impregnated by her father and who prays for her eyes to turn blue so she can be as beautiful and

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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.

loved as white counterparts. Contrast these books, told from the victims' point of view, with the bible, which contains a notorious and defamatory story defaming incest survivors as seductresses. Which has the more harmful message to students?

As we have repeatedly stressed, the "inappropriate" sections of the books the District has been removing are mainly minor passages from books with literary value. The District has now admitted it is willing to recognize the absurdity of its purge when applied to the bible, but fails to acknowledge the problem with the entire book-banning scheme and to take corrective action. The current wave of book banning has never been about protecting children; rather, it is about discouraging thought, and the District should not take part in that destructive effort any longer.

The reinstatement of the bible proves that the issue with the books that have been removed isn't sexual language, or graphic descriptions, but the viewpoint they express. The wisest course is to allow a diversity of viewpoints in school libraries, which allows students the freedom to explore difficult or provocative topics by themselves. Since the District has entered into the dangerous folly of evaluating and banning books, it must be even-handed and evaluate all books under the same standards. The District cannot engage in content-based discrimination and give preference to the bible.

Now that the District has confirmed that the vast amount of sexually explicit material in the bible does not warrant its removal from district schools, 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.

We look forward to hearing from you about this request at your earliest convenience.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Chris Line". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Christopher Line  
Staff Attorney  
Freedom From Religion Foundation

Cc: Belinda Kuck, Sensitive Materials Review Committee