

# FREEDOM FROM RELIGION *foundation*

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August 25, 2023

**SENT VIA EMAIL & U.S. MAIL: [mbush@skiatookschools.org](mailto:mbush@skiatookschools.org)**

Missy Bush  
Superintendent  
Skiatook Public Schools  
355 South Osage Avenue  
Skiatook, OK 74070

Re: Unconstitutional religious displays

Dear Superintendent Bush:

I am writing on behalf of the Freedom From Religion Foundation (FFRF) regarding a constitutional violation occurring in Skiatook Public Schools. FFRF is a national nonprofit organization with more than 40,000 members across the country, including members in Oklahoma. Our purposes are to protect the constitutional principle of separation between state and church, and to educate the public on matters relating to nontheism.

A concerned local District community member has reported that there are multiple religious messages on display at Skiatook High School. Our complainant reports that Room 120 has a bible verse posted on the south wall of the classroom. The verse is, John 3:16, "For GOD so loved the world that he gave his only SON that whoever believes in him should not perish but have ETERNAL LIFE. Please see the enclosed photo. Our complainant also reports that Room 114 has a sign that says, "He is still good," which is likely a reference to Daniel 3:18.

We write to ask that the District remove these displays and any other inappropriate religious displays from its schools in order to protect the rights of students to be free from religious coercion in their public schools.

The District violates the Constitution when it allows its schools to display religious symbols or messages. It is well settled that public schools may not show favoritism towards or coerce belief or participation in religion. *Santa Fe Indep. Sch. Dist. v. Doe*, 530 U.S. 290 (2000); *Lee v. Weisman*, 505 U.S. 577 (1992); *Wallace v. Jaffree*, 472 U.S. 38 (1985); *Epperson v. Arkansas*, 393 U.S. 97 (1967); *Sch. Dist. of Abington Twp. v. Schempp*, 374 U.S. 203 (1963); *Engel v. Vitale*, 370 U.S. 421 (1962); *McCullum v. Bd. of Ed.*, 333 U.S. 203 (1948). These displays violate this basic constitutional prohibition by creating the appearance that the District prefers religion over nonreligion, and specifically Christianity over any other religion.

Courts have continually held that school districts may not display religious messages or iconography in public schools. *See, e.g., Stone v. Graham*, 449 U.S. 39 (1980) (ruling that the

Ten Commandments may not be displayed on classroom walls); *Lee v. York County*, 484 F.3d 689 (4th Cir. 2007) (ruling that a teacher may be barred from displaying religious messages on classroom bulletin boards); *Washegesic v. Bloomingdale Pub. Schs.*, 33 F.3d 679 (6th Cir. 1994) (ruling that a painting of Jesus may not be displayed in a public school).

Religion is a divisive force in public schools. The Supreme Court has repeatedly noted that “[s]chool sponsorship of a religious message is impermissible because it sends the ancillary message to members of the audience who are nonadherents ‘that they are outsiders, not full members of the political community, and an accompanying message to adherents that they are insiders, favored members of the political community.’” *Santa Fe*, at 309 (quoting *Lynch v. Donnelly*, 465 U.S. 668, 688 (1984) (O’Connor, J., concurring)).

Additionally, this religious display needlessly alienates those students who are a part of the 49 percent of Generation Z who are religiously unaffiliated.<sup>1</sup>

In recognition of the District’s constitutional obligation to remain neutral toward religion, please remove these bible verse displays from Skiatook High School, as well as any other religious displays in school classrooms. Please reply in writing with the steps the District is taking to remedy this constitutional violation so that we may inform our complainant.

Sincerely,



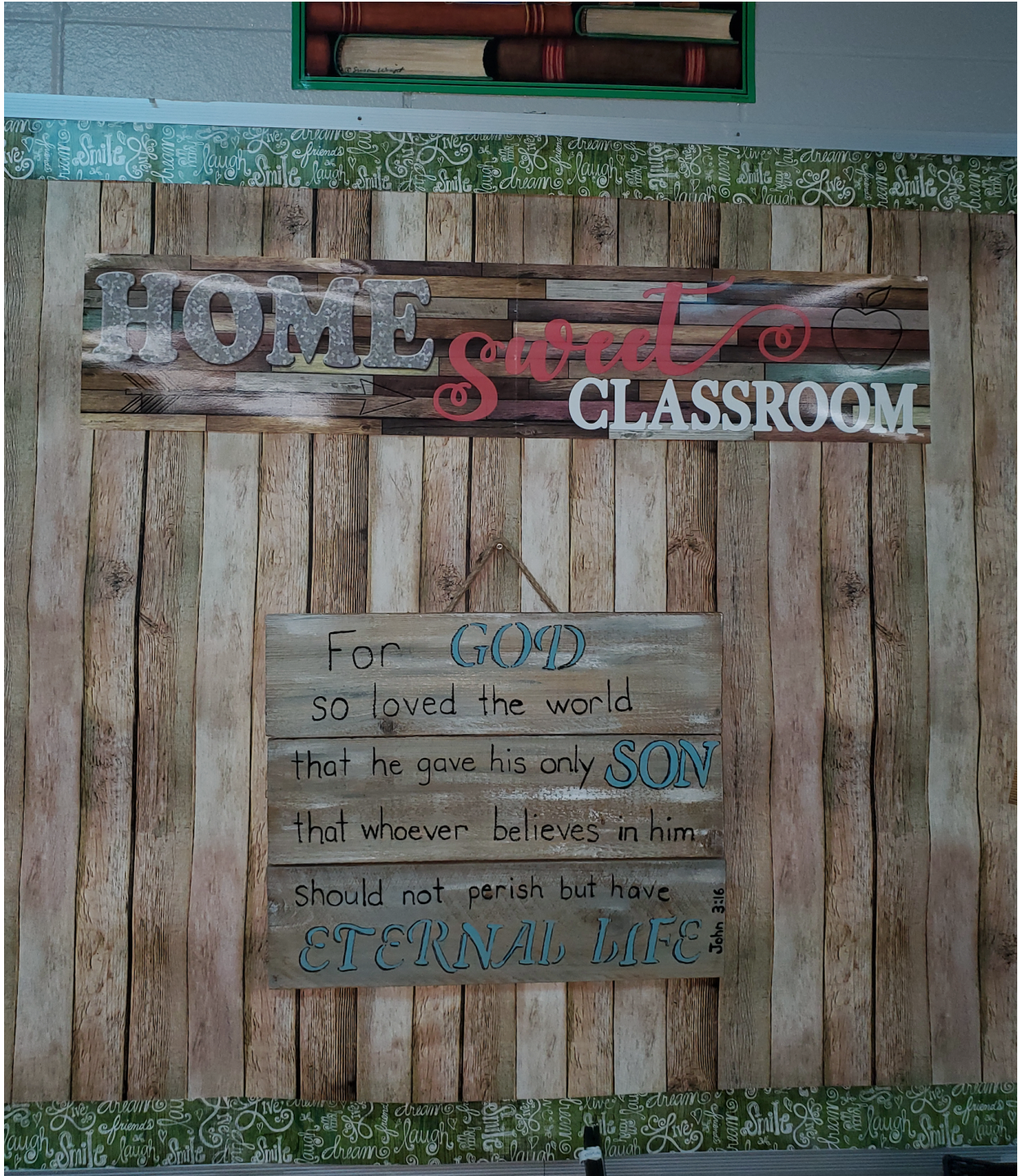
Christopher Line  
Staff Attorney  
Freedom From Religion Foundation

Enclosure

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<sup>1</sup> 2022 Cooperative Election Study of 60,000 respondents, analyzed by Ryan P. Burge [www.religioninpublic.blog/2023/04/03/gen-z-and-religion-in-2022/](http://www.religioninpublic.blog/2023/04/03/gen-z-and-religion-in-2022/).





HOME sweet CLASSROOM

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ETERNAL LIFE John 3:16