

FREEDOM FROM RELIGION *foundation*

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**SENT VIA EMAIL & U.S. MAIL: janella@sbcsk12.in.us, jmccullough@sb.school,
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John Anella
President, Board of School Trustees
South Bend Community School Corporation
215 South Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd.
South Bend, IN 46601

Re: Concerns Regarding Funding to Religious Ministries and **Public Records Request**

Dear President Annella and Board of Trustee members:

I am writing on behalf of the Freedom From Religion Foundation (FFRF) regarding concerns over South Bend Community School Corporation's funding of two Christian ministries for summer programming. FFRF is a national nonprofit organization with nearly 36,000 members across the country, including nearly 500 members in Indiana. 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 area resident has reported that the SBCSC Board of School Trustees has approved more than \$400,000 in funding for summer programs provided by local community partners, and that among those partners are two religious groups, Kingdom of Life Christian Cathedral and Transformation Ministries.¹ It is our understanding that the Board is providing \$20,040 to KLCC to run a summer Youth Academy and \$7,000 to Transformation Ministries to offer a basketball camp and several field trips.

Kingdom of Life Christian Cathedral is a church that is "dedicated to promoting the Kingdom of God and the rule and reign of God in the hearts of His people."² Transformation Ministries is a Christian ministry that "seek[s] to **transform the hearts and minds of youth** and their families while connecting others to the city in a positive way."³

While we commend the Board for its desire to provide summer programming for its students, the fact that Kingdom of Life Christian Cathedral and Transformation Ministries are Christian ministries that desire to spread their religious beliefs to others raises serious concerns about whether these funds will be directly supporting religious activities and proselytizing. For this

¹ <https://bit.ly/3wvGKOe>

² <http://kingdomlifecccc.org/our-team/>

³ <https://www.transformation58.com/aboutus>

reason, we write to ask that South Bend Community School Corporation immediately cease funding attendance for these programs unless it can be absolutely sure that these programs will not include religious activities, proselytizing, or even promotion of religion. Any use of federal funds by the School Corporation must be used for programs that are inclusive of all its students, regardless of their religious or nonreligious beliefs. Funding programs run by Christian ministries is simply not an appropriate use of federal funds and should not be promoted by the District.

It is well settled that public schools may not advance or promote religion. *See generally, 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). Moreover, “the preservation and transmission of religious beliefs and worship is a responsibility and a choice committed to the private sphere.” *Santa Fe Indep. Sch. Dist. v. Doe*, 530 U.S. 290, 310 (2000) (quoting *Lee v. Weisman*, 505 U.S. at 589).

Promoting and funding attendance for students to summer camps that may involve Christian activities or proselytizing ostracizes those students and families who identify as nonreligious or practice a minority religion. At this moment, 30% of the country is non-Christian, with 24% having no religious affiliation whatsoever; among young people, the “unaffiliated” figure jumps to 38%.⁴ There is little doubt that non-Christian and nonreligious children are among the students in South Bend Community School Corporation, and their freedom of conscience must be respected.

Furthermore, The Establishment Clause of the First Amendment prohibits the government from funding religious worship. *See, e.g., Comm. For Pub. Educ. & Religious Liberty v. Nyquist*, 413 U.S. 756, 778–79 (1973) (striking down government-subsidized maintenance and repair of nonpublic schools); *Tilton v. Richardson*, 403 U.S. 672, 689 (1971) (holding that a 20-year ban on religious use of a taxpayer-funded building did not go far enough to ensure the grant would not advance religion); *Wirtz v. City of S. Bend*, 813 F.Supp.2d 1051, 1068 (N.D. Ind., 2011) (holding that a property grant to a private religious school was unconstitutional). SBCSC may not direct federal funding or other financial benefits to facilitate students attending a summer program where they will engage in religious worship or activities.

We ask that if South Bend Community School Corporation is not able to provide absolute assurances that these programs will not involve religious activities or proselytizing that it immediately cease funding or promoting these programs in order to comply with the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment and to protect the rights of all School Corporation students, parents, and community members. Please respond in writing with the actions SBCSC plans to take to address this serious constitutional concern, and please respond to the following public records request.

⁴ Robert P. Jones and Daniel Cox, *America's Changing Religious Identity*. Public Religion Research Institute, 2017. <https://www.prrri.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/PRRI-Religion-Report.pdf>

Public Records Request

Pursuant to the Indiana Access to Public Records Act (IC § 5-14-3-1 et seq.), I hereby request a copy of the following:

- 1) Any agreements between South Bend Community School Corporation and Kingdom of Life Christian Cathedral;
- 2) Any financial records related to South Bend Community School Corporation's funding of \$20,040 to Kingdom of Life Christian Cathedral;
- 3) Any communications, including but not limited to emails, sent to or from South Bend Community School Corporation representatives, employees, or board members regarding Kingdom of Life Christian Cathedral and the funding of its summer youth academy;
- 4) Any agreements between South Bend Community School Corporation and Transformation Ministries;
- 5) Any financial records related to South Bend Community School Corporation's funding of \$7,000 to Transformation Ministries;
- 6) Any communications, including but not limited to emails, sent to or from South Bend Community School Corporation representatives, employees, or board members regarding Transformation Ministries and the funding of its basketball camps;

If all or any part of this request is denied, I request that I be provided with a written statement of the grounds for the denial. If I can provide any clarification that will help expedite your attention to my request, please contact me at chris@ffrf.org. Thank you for your time and attention to this matter.

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