

# FREEDOM FROM RELIGION *foundation*

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April 18, 2011

**SENT VIA FAX & U.S. MAIL**  
**(423) 354-1004**

Dr. Jubal Yennie  
Director of Schools  
Sullivan County Department of Education  
PO Box 306  
Blountville TN 37617

Dear Dr. Yennie:

I am writing on behalf of a concerned district student, and other area members of the Freedom From Religion Foundation ("FFRF") to alert you to a serious separation of state and church concern occurring in your district. FFRF is a national nonprofit organization representing nearly 16,500 members across the country, including over 200 in Tennessee. FFRF's purpose is to protect the constitutional principle of separation between state and church.

It is our information and understanding that a Young Life representative regularly promotes Young Life during the school day at area schools. Our complainant informs us that Young Life is active in several district schools including South High School, North High School and Central High School. We understand that one Young Life representative visits students during the lunch hour at Central High School.

As you are aware, Young Life is a Christian youth organization whose sole mission is to proselytize. Its webpage states its indoctrinating mission:

"Introducing adolescents to Jesus Christ and helping them grow in their faith. We accomplish our mission by...

- Praying for young people.
- Going where kids are.
- Building personal relationships with them.
- Winning the right to be heard.
- Providing experiences that are fun, adventurous and life-changing.
- Sharing our lives and the Good News of Jesus Christ with adolescents.
- Inviting them to personally respond to this Good News.
- Loving them regardless of their response.
- Nurturing kids so they might grow in their love for Christ and the knowledge of God's Word and become people who can share their faith with others.

- Helping young people develop the skills, assets and attitudes to reach their full God-given potential.
- Encouraging kids to live connected to the Body of Christ by being an active member of a local congregation.
- Working with a team of like-minded individuals -- volunteer leaders, committee members, donors and staff.”

Young Life has a vision that “every adolescent will have the opportunity to meet Jesus Christ and follow Him.”

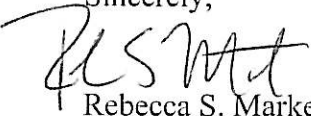
It is inappropriate for Sullivan County Department of Education to offer Young Life unique access to proselytize a captive audience during the school day on school property. This practice is especially concerning when it occurs on a weekly basis. In fact, no outside adults should be provided carte blanche access to minors – a captive audience – in a public school. This predatory conduct is inappropriate and should raise many red flags.

Furthermore, the district’s repeated and excessive allowance of Young Life to proselytize during school hours is a violation of the Establishment Clause. Courts have granted injunctions against schools for their complacency in similar situations. *See Roark v. South Iron R-1 School Dist.* 540 F.Supp.2d 1047, 1059 (E.D.Mo., 2008); *upheld in relevant part by* 573 F.3d 556, (8<sup>th</sup> Cir. 2009) (“The distribution of Bibles in the classroom during school hours with school personnel present sends a message of endorsement of the Bible and its teachings...Additionally, the distribution's location, time, and circumstances created an excessive entanglement with religion.”).

Finally, the school board’s own policy on religion acknowledges, “the principle responsibility for religious instruction rests with parents and religious institutions.” See Policy 3025. The presence of Young Life staff in the school usurps parents’ rights to direct the religious upbringing of their children. Allowing Young Life representatives access to school property during school hours further violates Policy 3025, which states, “the role of the schools must be one of instruction, not one of religious indoctrination.” The district lends support to Young Life’s vision of “introducing adolescents to Jesus Christ and helping them grow in their faith” by permitting lunchroom visits. No religious organization should have special access to proselytize during the school day at any area schools.

We respectfully request that your district refrain from allowing Young Life access to students during school hours. Please notify us immediately in writing about the steps you are taking to end this violation so that we may notify our complainant. Thank you for your time and attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

  
Rebecca S. Markert  
Staff Attorney