



# FREEDOM FROM RELIGION FOUNDATION

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February 19, 2010

**SENT VIA FAX & U.S. MAIL**  
**(920) 662-9777**

COPY

Damian LaCroix  
Superintendent  
Howard-Suamico School District  
2700 Lineville Rd  
Green Bay WI 54313

Re: Christian Cross in Public School District Promotional Video

Dear Mr. LaCroix:

I am writing on behalf of concerned district residents and taxpayers, and other area members of the Freedom From Religion Foundation (FFRF), who object to the inclusion of a Christian cross in the promotional video for the school district. FFRF is a national nonprofit organization with over 14,600 members, including nearly 1,200 in Wisconsin. Our purpose is to protect the constitutional principle of separation between state and church.

It is our information and understanding that the Howard-Suamico School District ("District") produced and released a promotional video entitled "I've Got a Place." A link to this video is posted on the District's website. During the first minute of the video, you, as District Superintendent, introduce the audience to Howard-Suamico. You state, "Howard-Suamico enjoys national recognition as a great place to live, to work, and to raise a family" while the video shows images of the area. The last segment of your statement "to raise a family" is accompanied by a shot of a large Christian cross atop a church steeple. Please find enclosed a "screenshot" from the video showing this cross.

It is well settled that public schools may not advance, prefer 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 Twshp. v. Schempp*, 374 U.S. 203 (1963); *Engel v. Vitale*, 370 U.S. 421 (1962). No public school district may urge religious points of view on students or their families.

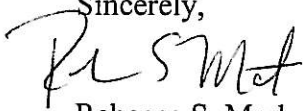
The District should take immediate action to remove religious imagery from its promotional materials. Showing a Latin cross, the preeminent and unmistakable symbol of Christianity, demonstrates your school district's unlawful preference not only for

religion over non-religion, but also Christianity over other faiths. This “[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 accompanying message to adherents that they are insiders, favored members of the political community.’” *Santa Fe Indep. Sch. Dist. v. Doe*, 530 U.S. 290, 309-10 (2001)(quoting *Lynch v. Donnelly*, 465 U.S. at 668)(O’Connor, J., concurring). The inclusion of this Christian symbol in the video excludes any non-Christian families in Howard-Suamico as well as the 15% of the U.S. population that is nonreligious. (The nonreligious segment of the Wisconsin population mirrors the national average) See Kosmin, Barry A. and Keysar, Ariela, *American Religious Identification Survey*, which can be found at <http://www.americanreligionsurvey-aris.org/>. The religious message the District sends through this video segment turns any non-Christian families with children in your public schools into outsiders within the Howard-Suamico community. This is unseemly and inappropriate.

There are secular ways for the District to convey to the general public that Howard-Suamico is a great place to live, to work and to raise a family. There is no reason for the District to include a powerful sectarian symbol to persuade the public to learn more about the Howard-Suamico School District.

We ask that you immediately remove the segment showing the cross from the “I’ve Got a Place” video. Certainly, given the immense amount of footage shown in the nine-minute video, there are more appropriate, secular images to display while discussing the benefits of raising a family in your District. We further ask that you respond immediately in writing about the steps you are taking to remedy this serious constitutional violation.

Sincerely,



Rebecca S. Markert  
Staff Attorney

Enclosure