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May 7, 2024

VIA EMAIL

Hirsh M. Joshi
Freedom From Religion Foundation
hjoshi@ffrf.org

RE: Hinton Community School District

Dear Mr. Joshi:

This office represents the Hinton Community School District. The District has forwarded to us your correspondence dated April 24, 2024, on behalf of the Freedom From Religion Foundation (FFRF), regarding allegations of a school employee leading religious meetings of a student group. Please let this letter serve as the District's response to your correspondence.

The District is committed to ensuring compliance with applicable law, including the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. You are correct the Establishment Clause requires that the District not take actions respecting the establishment of religion. The District is aware of its obligations in this regard, and appreciates the purpose underlying this important constitutional provision.

Once the District was made aware of the concerns included in your correspondence, it took action to review the situation and respond accordingly.

In this case, Mr. [REDACTED] is a retired coach. He is currently a school bus driver at the District, however, he is not working as a school employee when he is in attendance at an FCA meeting. All FCA meetings are voluntary and student-initiated. The District will advise all school employees that their presence at such meetings must be only in a nonparticipatory capacity.

In addition, the District will take steps to ensure social media accounts held in connection with District employment are not used to post messages that could be perceived by students as sponsorship of a particular religion or religion in general.

Of course, the Establishment Clause should not be interpreted to infringe on a student's free exercise of religion or equal access to school facilities.

I trust this letter resolves your concern. Please pass along thanks to the complainant you serve for bringing this matter to the District's attention. Thank you, as well, for your correspondence. The District is dedicated to working with all interested parties in order to protect the interests of all students and provide the best learning environment possible.

Very truly yours,

Ahlers & Cooney, P.C.

By /s/ *Kristy M. Latta*

Kristy M. Latta

cc:  District Superintendent