

FREEDOM FROM RELIGION *foundation*

P.O. BOX 750 • MADISON, WI 53701 • (608) 256-8900 • WWW.FFRF.ORG

September 18, 2024

SENT VIA EMAIL & U.S. MAIL: mike@leasorcrass.com

Mike Leasor
Legal Counsel
Mansfield Independent School District
302 West Broad Street
Mansfield, TX 76063

Re: Unconstitutional Religious Verse Display

Dear Attorney Leasor:

I am writing on behalf of the Freedom From Religion Foundation (FFRF) regarding a constitutional violation occurring at Mansfield High School. FFRF is a national nonprofit organization with over 40,000 members across the country, including a chapter and more than 1,700 members in Texas. Our purposes are to protect the constitutional principle of separation between state and church, and to educate the public on matters relating to nontheism.

We are informed that Mansfield High School English Teacher [REDACTED] places religious quotes around her classroom to communicate religious messages. One poster reads “I can do all things through him who gives me strength. Philippians 4:13.” One day, [REDACTED]’s whiteboard read “Today’s Quote: When the time is right, the Lord will make it happen. Isaiah 66:22.” [REDACTED] also places Latin crosses across her classroom. Please see the enclosed pictures.

Teachers cannot use their classroom to proselytize over a captive audience—their students. We ask the District to investigate and counsel [REDACTED] and other staff to refrain from placing religious displays in the classroom.

The First Amendment’s Establishment Clause prohibits schools from displaying religious messages, including bible verses. 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); *McCollum v. Bd. of Educ.*, 333 U.S. 203 (1948). Posting bible verses and Latin crosses in the classroom displays a clear government favoritism towards religion over nonreligion, and Christianity above all other faiths.

Courts have continually held that public 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 Cnty.*, 484 F.3d 689 (4th Cir. 2007) (ruling that a teacher may be barred from displaying religious messages on

classroom bulletin boards); *Washegesic v. Bloomington Pub. Schs.*, 33 F.3d 679 (6th Cir. 1994) (ruling that a painting of Jesus may not be displayed in a public school).

Please note that requiring [REDACTED] to take down religious displays in her classroom does not implicate her First Amendment rights. See generally *Garcetti v. Ceballos*, 547 U.S. 410 (2006); *City of San Diego v. Roe*, 543 U.S. 77 (2004); *Johnson v. Poway Unified Sch. Dist.*, 658 F.3d 954, 970 (9th Cir. 2011), *cert. denied*, 132 S. Ct. 1807 (2012).

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*, 530 U.S. at 309 (quoting *Lynch v. Donnelly*, 465 U.S. 668, 688 (1984) (O’Connor, J., concurring)). This practice needlessly marginalizes any students who are part of the forty-nine percent of Gen Z who are religiously unaffiliated.¹

To respect the First Amendment rights of students, the District must counsel its staff—including [REDACTED] to take down religious displays in their classrooms. That means [REDACTED] must remove crosses and biblical quotes from her classroom. Please respond in writing with the steps the District will take to address these violations. Thank you for your time and attention.

Sincerely,



Hirsh M. Joshi
Patrick O’Reiley Legal Fellow
Freedom From Religion Foundation

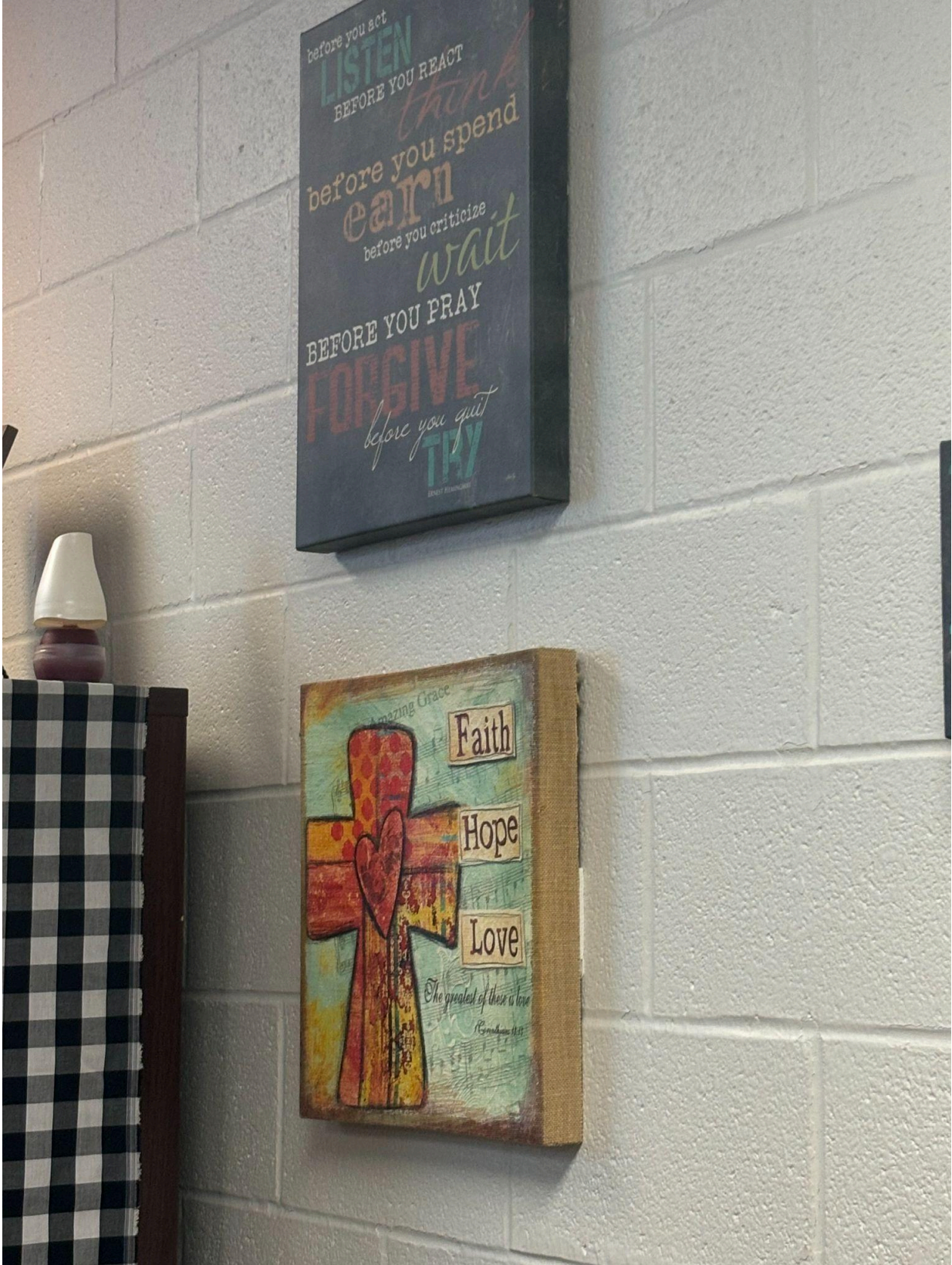
Enclosures

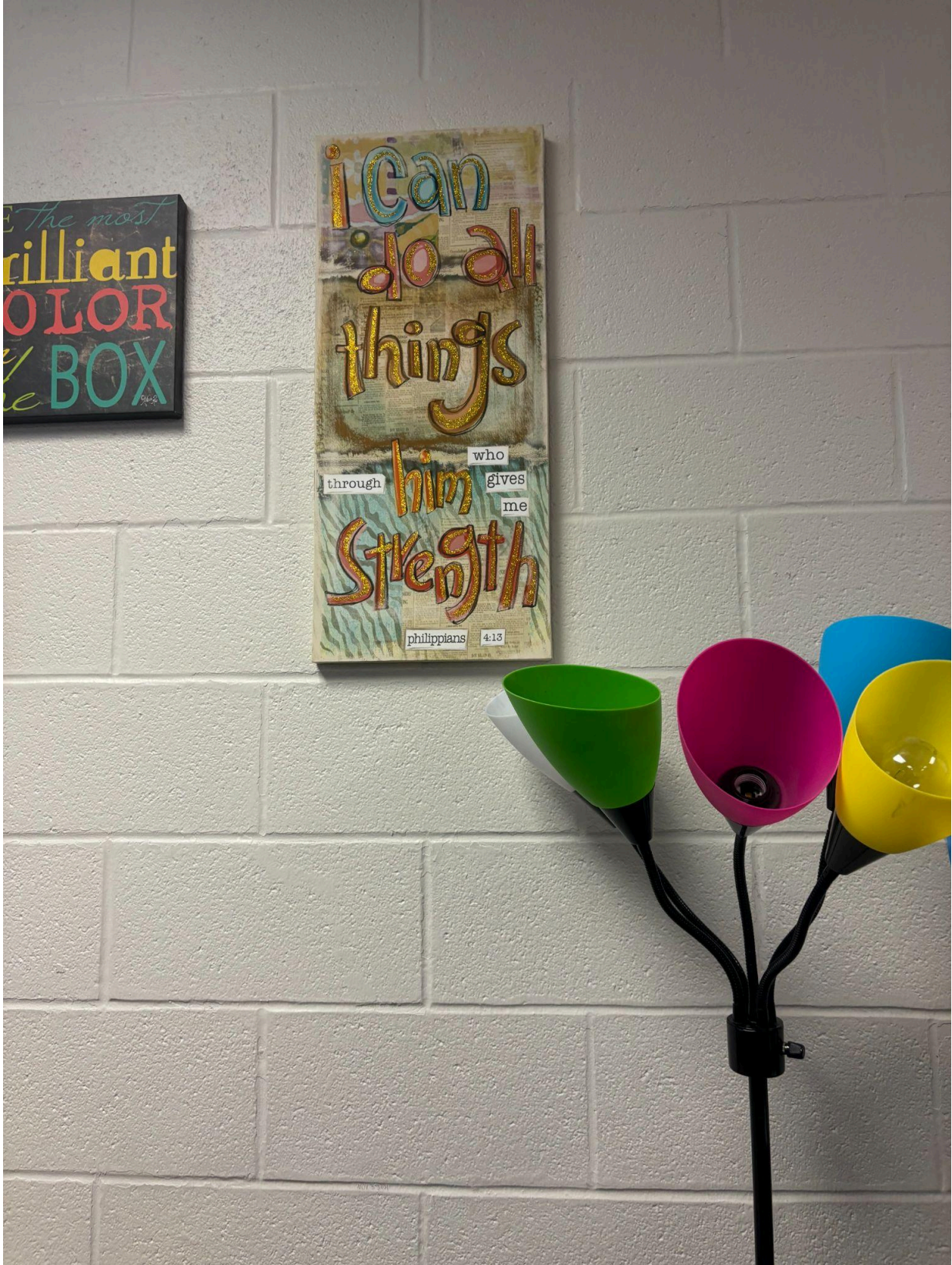
¹ Ryan P. Burge, *2022 Cooperative Election Study of 60,000 respondents*, April 3, 2023, www.religioninpublic.blog/2023/04/03/gen-z-and-religion-in-2022/.

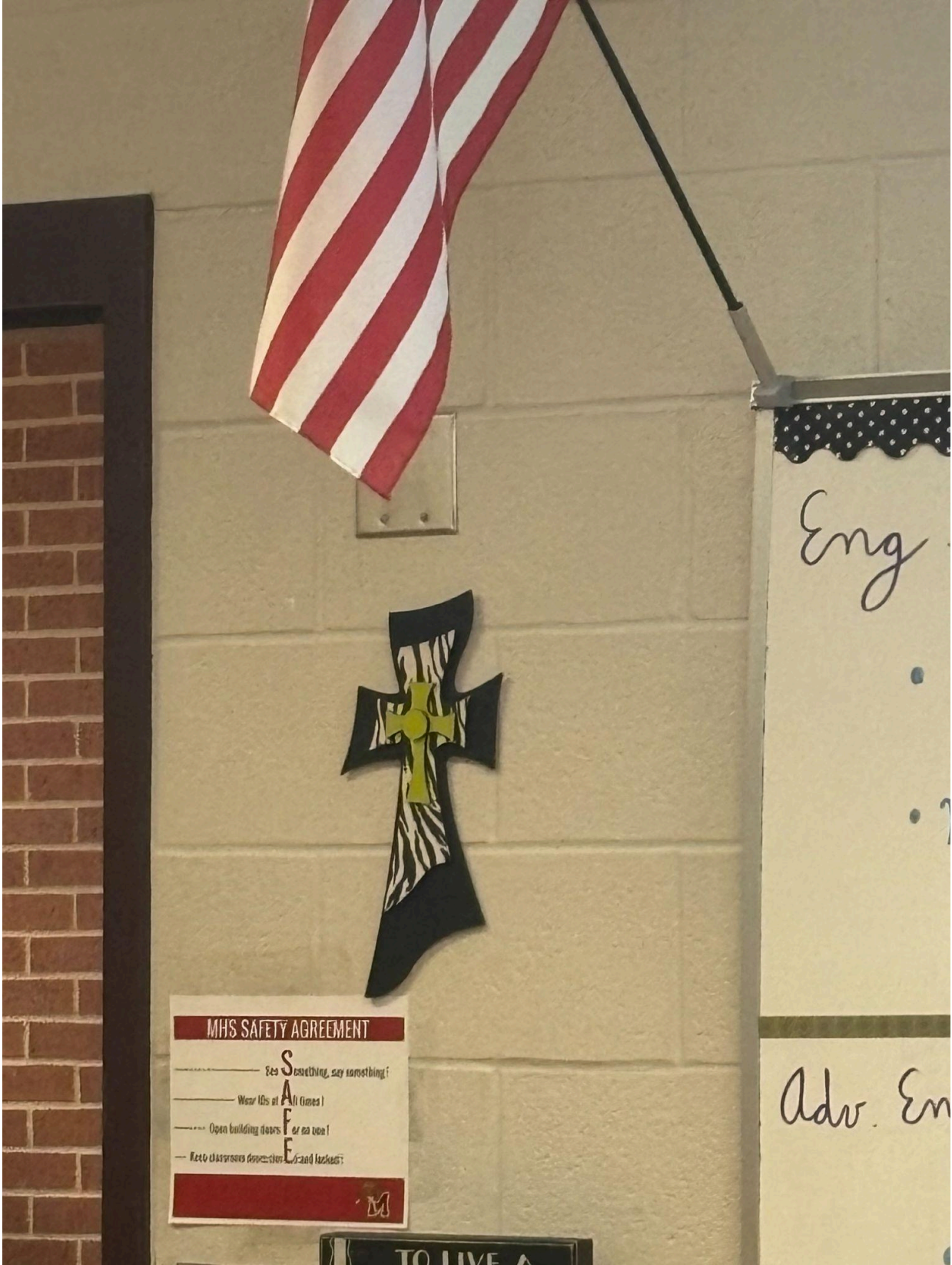
TODAYS
QUOTE

"When the time is right,
the Lord will make it happen."

Isaiah 66:22







DO
HAT
OU
M

PARE ME THE *Drama*

WITH GOD
all things are
possible
MATTHEW 19:26

