

Atheists Move to Block Handicap Accessibility Renovations at Church

An atheist group is crossing the line with its attack on children with disabilities.

The Freedom From Religion Foundation is claiming that the Cedar Falls Community School District in Iowa cannot make safety and handicap-accessibility renovations to the nearby Kaio Church. The school district wants to use the church facilities to accommodate overcrowding for its preschool program and meet city codes.

Kaio's location offers students easy access to Southdale Elementary School's food service, transportation and playground equipment. However, the school district needs to make a few modifications in order to bring the interior of the facility into compliance with city codes, including converting a janitor's closet into a handicap-accessible restroom, adding two preschool handicap-accessible restrooms and installing two emergency exits in the designated classroom spaces.

"School districts shouldn't be forced to deny services to children simply because groups hostile to religion misrepresent the Constitution," says Alliance Defense Fund Senior Counsel David Cortman. "It is astounding that the Freedom From Religion Foundation cares more about furthering its distorted view of the Constitution's Establishment Clause than making sure that school children are safe and that handicap children's needs are met."

The Freedom From Religion Foundation sent a letter to the district claiming that spending district funds to renovate the pre-school facilities at the church violates the Establishment Clause of the Constitution. The ADF argues that adding

handicap-accessible restrooms and installing emergency exits at the district's alternative site for preschool students in no way violates the U.S. Constitution. The organization sent a letter to the school district discounting the atheist group's contention.

"Modifying physical space at a church to make it safe and handicap-accessible for students does not translate into the advancement of religion," says ADF Legal Counsel Jeremy Tedesco. "It strains credulity to claim that a church can co-opt handicap-accessible bathrooms and emergency exits for the purpose of promoting its religious beliefs. The courts have upheld such non-religious, 'cosmetic repairs' as posing no constitutional problem."