

Let Them Pray: How the ACLJ is Fighting for Prayer at Football Games

Once again, the government has treated Christians praying as if it were some kind of radioactive contaminant.

Two private high school Christian football teams planned to pray before a championship game and wanted to use the public-address system to do so, but the state athletic association said no. Their reason: transmitting a Christian prayer would violate the “separation of church and state.”

Worse still, a federal trial judge agreed with the state. Enough is enough. Stop treating prayer like asbestos.

In 2015, Cambridge Christian School of Tampa and University Christian School of Jacksonville, both Christian private high schools, were poised to face off in the 2A state championship football game held at the famous Citrus Bowl. Cambridge Christian School had a tradition of saying a prayer before the game. Both schools agreed to hold the traditional pre-game prayer and broadcast it over the loudspeaker.

This is when the government stepped in to mute their religious speech. The Florida State High School Athletic Association (FHSAA) denied their request to use the loudspeaker. They did not say it was based on a neutral policy that no non-state official could use the sound system.

Instead, they denied the student’s right because they claimed it would violate the “separation of church and state.” They even claim that broadcasting the team’s prayer would mean the state was itself doing the praying.

They are wrong. And we’re taking action. We have just filed

an amicus (friend of the court) brief in support of the schools before the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Eleventh Circuit. We make three straight forward common-sense constitutional arguments.

First, it is simply not true that every message the government allows becomes "government speech." Obviously, a message from the coaches urging sportsmanship, like a graduation speech from a guest honoree, would not be the government itself speaking.

Second, the Supreme Court has never held that private persons speaking on their own behalf constitutes government endorsement of religion. In fact, the Supreme Court has repeatedly distinguished between government speech endorsing religion, which is an Establishment Clause problem, and private speech endorsing religion, which is constitutionally protected.

Third, the state's actions actually violate the free speech rights of the students. By denying private Christian prayer solely because it would be religious, FHSA has engaged in outright "viewpoint discrimination" in violation of the First Amendment.

It is time to stand up and fight back against the blatant attack on prayer. This anti-Christian bigotry has spread like a virus across campuses and school systems throughout our country.

At the ACLJ, we are fighting in defense of the freedom of religion every day. We are defending the rights of Christians to pray and Christian judges to be confirmed to the bench. We continue our fight to defend the rights of a Christian student denied college admissions solely based on his Christian faith, now heading to the Supreme Court.

Enough is enough. Let Christians pray. With your continued support, we at the ACLJ can continue our fight to defend our

first freedom. {eoa}

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