

Atheist Group Seeks to Deny Poor Children Christmas Gifts

An atheist group has threatened to sue a school in West Columbia, S.C., for allowing its students to participate in Operation Christmas Child, a program that blesses needy children at Christmastime.

Alliance Defending Freedom sent East Point Academy a letter offering free legal assistance after the American Humanist Association threatened to file a lawsuit against the school for including a community service project sponsored by a religious organization as one of the many programs its students may voluntarily participate in.

“Public schools should provide students with as many community service opportunities as possible and not engage in unconstitutional discrimination,” says senior legal counsel Jeremy Tedesco. “The American Humanist Association is incorrect that neutrality toward religion requires schools to discriminate against beneficial programs simply because they are run by Christians. That is not neutrality but targeted religious discrimination forbidden by the First Amendment.”

East Point Academy offers a variety of humanitarian community service programs, including Operation Christmas Child (OCC), in which students can voluntarily participate throughout the year. OCC is sponsored by Samaritan's Purse, a Christian organization that works with local churches and ministry partners to deliver gifts to needy children around the world. OCC has provided gifts to more than 100 million impoverished boys and girls in more than 130 countries.

The Alliance Defending Freedom letter explains that “there is nothing illegal about a public school providing students an opportunity to put together a box of gifts for impoverished

children throughout the world just because the toy drive is sponsored by a religious organization.” Also, the letter states that the academy “has taken no actions that promote any religious aspect of OCC. It simply offers OCC as an optional opportunity for students to engage in humanitarian aid to needy children.”

The letter also encourages the academy to “demonstrate to its students and to its wider audience that the correct response to being wrongfully accused of violating the law is to take a stand, rather than acquiesce to the accuser’s unreasonable demands.”

“It’s shameful for groups like the American Humanist Association to attack charity events that provide impoverished children with Christmas gifts they wouldn’t otherwise receive,” adds senior legal counsel Kevin Theriot. “We hope that East Point Academy will decide to provide OCC as an optional humanitarian service program for years to come.”