

Atheists Force Down Jesus Portrait at Ohio School, Collect \$95K

An Ohio middle school must remove a portrait of Jesus from its school grounds and pay \$95,000 after settling a lawsuit Friday with the American Civil Liberties Union of Ohio and Wisconsin-based Freedom From Religion Foundation (FFRF).

Jackson Middle School in Jackson, Ohio, has been involved in the legal battle with atheists for nearly a year over the portrait that has hung in the entryway of the school since the Truman administration.

The FFRF sent Jackson City School District Superintendent Phil Howard a letter in January claiming that hanging the portrait in the school was illegal and an “egregious violation of the First Amendment.”

Howard said the only way the portrait of the “Head of Christ” would be removed was with a court order. Judge Algernon L. Marbley issued a consent decree Friday, ordering the school to permanently remove the painting.

The superintendent called the settlement a “best-case scenario” and said the district’s insurer will pay the \$95,000. The five anonymous plaintiffs in the lawsuit—three parents and two students—will each receive \$3,000.

“All of this was unnecessary,” says James Hardiman, legal director for the ACLU of Ohio. “The law is pretty clear ... the display of this particular kind of religious artifact [in a public school] is unconstitutional.”