

Atheists Target Football Helmets in Latest Religious Freedom Assault

The attacks against **religious freedom** in America continue at a fevered pitch, the latest coming when a Wisconsin school district ordered the removal of a religious symbol from the helmets of a joint public-private school football team.

The logo, which contained a bishop's hat and cross, was removed from the Shorewood-Messmer co-op high school football team's headgear by the school district after a lone parent said its inclusion was a violation of the U.S. Constitution.

Not so, says Mat Staver, founder and president of the Liberty Counsel.

"I think this was a knee-jerk reaction to this issue, and it's pretty indicative of how things are going in this country," said Staver, a prominent attorney whose organization has dedicated itself to advancing religious freedom, the sanctity of life and the family since 1989 and provides pro-bono assistance and representation on such topics. "It's a gross misunderstanding of the first amendment to the U.S. Constitution and the separation of church and state.

"There is nothing that would support their claim that it's unconstitutional. Some have tried to promote the idea that anything religious should be excluded from public domain. That is completely erroneous. No federal court case has ever ruled that **religious symbols** and language is off limits in the public square. It's simply a falsehood."

The Shorewood-Messmer football team had carried the logo on its helmets during its first five games this season, reported that the logo was created by a Shorewood student and put on

the team's helmets in August. Football coaches from both schools signed off on the project, along with high school administrators.

Shorewood School District Superintendent Martin Lexmond told that he made the decision to remove the logos after consulting the school board.

"It just didn't occur to anybody that there might be questions about it," Lexmond said. "A parent raised the question asking if this was a violation of church and state."

The case is similar to one that is ongoing in Kountze, Texas. A school district there ordered the cheerleaders to stop putting Bible verses on the banners because they believed doing so violated the law on **religious expression** at public school events. The cheerleaders and a group of parents sued the school district, claiming their rights of **free speech** and religious liberties were being taken away.

A Houston judge temporarily sided with the cheerleaders, issuing an injunction and allowing them to continue to put Scriptures on the banners. A final ruling on the case is scheduled for next week.

The Freedom From Religion Foundation was the driving force behind the situation at the Texas high school.

Staver said most situations similar to the ones in Wisconsin and Texas are a result of "misinformation and ignorance."

"These people try to intimidate, and they're successful a lot of times because people are afraid of litigation," Staver said. "It is intentional misrepresentation of the law."

"Organizations like the Freedom From Religion Foundation are, at the very core, **atheist** and hostile. They are opposed to anything have to do with Christianity. Part of the battle we face is the lack of education on this matter. People need to

know the truth.”

For now, the logos will stay off the helmets in Shorewood.

If asked, Staver said the Liberty Counsel would handle cases like the ones in Texas and Wisconsin, pro bono.

The Freedom From Religion Foundation also recently tried to have **prayer** over the public address system prior to football games at the University of Tennessee banned. They contacted officials at UT, and the request was considered but denied.

The FFRF, however, was successful with the same ploy earlier this year at the University of Tennessee-Chattanooga.

“I applaud the people at the University of Tennessee for not backing down,” Staver said.