

Calif. School District Denies Bible Club Right to Meet for Free

The fate of after-school Bible clubs in California may rest on the outcome of a lawsuit filed Monday in United States District Court. The suit filed by the American Center for Law and Justice (ACLJ) argues that Orange County's Buena Park School District unconstitutionally rejected a Christian youth club's request to meet in district facilities on equal grounds with similar, nonprofit, nonreligious youth organizations.

The "Good News Club," a local affiliate of the international, Bible-centered organization Child Evangelism Fellowship, provides school kids with extracurricular educational programming and recreational activities that teach about life from a biblical perspective.

Child Evangelism Fellowship's West Orange County chapter was denied a request to use district facilities free of charge, despite California Education Code allowing nonprofit, youth-oriented groups to use public school facilities at no cost. Similar nonprofit groups have historically been permitted to meet after hours without charge at Buena Park schools.

"This selective application of policy speaks ill of the Buena Park School District's respect for and understanding of the Constitution," said David French, ACLJ senior counsel. "Freedom doesn't stop at the schoolhouse door. Child Evangelism Fellowship has every right to equal treatment and access to public school facilities for its after-school events."

The ACLJ's lawsuit, posted here, contends Buena Park School District stands in violation of the **First Amendment** on free speech, free exercise of religion and establishment of

religion grounds. It also asserts that Child Evangelism Fellowship's Fourteenth Amendment right to equal protection under the law has been impacted by the district's selective application of its own facility usage policies.

"Ultimately, this case is about legal equality. Religious speech is entitled to the same access as any other kind of speech, and religious students deserve the same treatment as all other students," said French.