

Elementary School Censors 'God' in Student's Veteran's Day Poem

Just 25 miles from a North Carolina college that censored the phrase "Christmas trees" before reversing course last week, an elementary school has removed a sentence referring to "God" from a first-grader's poem commemorating her grandfather's military service. The school forced the student to remove the sentence prior to presenting the poem at a **Veteran's Day** ceremony last month.

The censored sentence, referring to one of her grandfathers who served during the Vietnam War, read, "He prayed to God for peace, he prayed to God for strength." Alliance Defending Freedom sent a letter Friday on behalf of McDowell County, N.C., residents who are concerned that similar acts of unconstitutional **censorship** could occur again.

"America's public schools should encourage, not restrict, the constitutionally protected freedom of students to express their faith," said ADF Legal Counsel Matt Sharp. "Students should not be censored when speaking about their faith or honoring those who valiantly served to protect our freedoms. The poem described the historical actions of her grandfather, and the Constitution protects such student expression at school."

The first-grader attends West Marion Elementary School in the McDowell County School District. As the Alliance Defending Freedom letter to the district and the school explains, "School officials may not suppress or exclude the personal speech of students simply because the speech is religious or contains a religious perspective."

"The censorship of this young student's poem about her

grandfathers is repugnant to the **First Amendment** rights of all students and sends an impermissible message of hostility towards religion,” the letter continues, adding that “the First Amendment protects the right of students to discuss their faith—especially when they are discussing a historical event like this student in her poem honoring her grandfathers.”

The letter requests changes to the school district’s policies to ensure that unconstitutional censorship does not continue to occur at any of the district’s schools.