

Lunchroom Supervisor Rebukes 5-Year-Old for Praying Over Meal

Liberty Institute attorneys on Tuesday sent a demand letter, on behalf of clients Marcos Perez and his daughter, to school administrators at Carillon Elementary School in Oviedo, Fla., requesting that school officials cease engaging in religious discrimination in violation of federal and state law.

Last month, a school lunchroom supervisor told Perez's 5-year-old daughter that it was wrong to bow her head in prayer before she ate her lunch. [Click here to view the demand letter.](#)

When the young girl replied, "But it's good to pray," she was told, "It is not good." When she attempted to do so anyway, she was again restrained from bowing her head, folding her hands and silently saying grace, the letter explains.

"This is a violation of the federal law and we expect the school district to apologize to the Perezes and the community as well as take steps to ensure this does not happen again," the letter states.

"Of course students can pray at school!" says Liberty Institute senior counsel Jeremy Dys. "As the Supreme Court held over half a century ago: Students do not 'shed their constitutional rights to freedom of speech or expression at the schoolhouse gate.' The school is in violation of Department of Education guidelines that specifically protect this type of prayer, and thus could jeopardize its federal funding."

The Perez family cites this offense to their daughter's religious liberty as the most immediate reason to remove their

daughter from the public education system.

“Mainly because of this incident, we have exercised our option as parents to teach our daughter at home,” Perez says. “We live in a very good school district, but we cannot, in good conscience, send our daughter to a school where her religious liberty has been compromised.”

Liberty Institute continues to investigate this situation on behalf of its clients and other students who experience unnecessary censoring of their religious liberty while at school.

Last fall, Liberty Institute represented 10-year-old Erin Shead, whose teacher informed her that she could not write an essay about Jesus as her hero. That situation led to the Tennessee General Assembly passing a bill with overwhelming bipartisan support to expand student religious liberty. Similarly, Liberty Institute is still investigating claims by a mother in South Carolina who was told that her 8-year-old daughter could not complete a similar school assignment for fear of violating the so-called “separation of church and state.”