

NH High School Affirms Parent's Freedom to Pray

A mother of two students at Concord High School in New Hampshire is now allowed to continue to pray on campus before the start of school after Alliance Defending Freedom (ADF) sent a legal letter to the district addressing Freedom From Religion Foundation's (FFRF) complaint and request to prohibit her prayers.

"There's no legitimate basis for public school officials to shut down private, nondisruptive religious speech," says legal counsel Matthew Sharp. "Parents who want to support their local schools by praying for the students and staff before school are exercising their constitutional freedoms. Atheist groups are attempting to browbeat schools into believing otherwise. We commend Concord School District for recognizing this freedom and allowing a concerned mother to continue to pray on campus."

In February, after bullets were found in the bathroom at Concord High School, Lizarda Urena met with the principal to request permission to pray on campus for everyone's safety. She was granted permission and did so every day in the morning for no more than 15 minutes on the steps leading to the auditorium.

Urena's prayers did not interfere with classes, and her prayers were never endorsed by the school. In July, FFRF sent the school district a letter demanding that Urena be prohibited from continuing to pray.

The ADF letter explains, "Parents have legitimate rights to come to their children's school for many purposes, whether to drop off a forgotten book, meet with a teacher to discuss behavioral problems, or stop by to offer a prayer of support

and protection.”

The letter also explains, “A school’s accommodation of a parent’s desire to pray for her children does not violate the Constitution.” It further says, “Several courts have upheld the practice of schools permitting parents on campus to pray for the safety and protection of students.”

“The Constitution should be the only permission slip students and parents need to exercise their freedom of speech,” adds senior legal counsel Jeremy Tedesco. “We commend the school for not caving to FFRF’s unwarranted demands and urge other schools to follow their example.”