

NY Principal Bans 'God Bless the USA' at Kindergarten Graduation

A New York City principal trampled on the **First Amendment** free-speech rights of kindergartners by refusing to allow them to perform "God Bless the USA" at an upcoming graduation ceremony.

The American Center for Law Justice (ACLJ) sent a protest letter to city and school officials in response to the decision by Principal Greta Hawkins of New York City P.S. 90 to pull Lee Greenwood's patriotic ballad from her school's kindergarten graduation program—saying the song is not "age appropriate" and could end up "offending other cultures."

Wednesday, in a matter of hours, more than 1,000 concerned Americans signed an ACLJ petition urging that the song ban be reversed.

"There are no constitutional impediments preventing this song from being part of the program. In fact, permitting students to sing 'God Bless the USA' at the graduation ceremony is not only proper but fully consistent with the Establishment Clause of the **First Amendment**. There's still time to take corrective action, reverse this ban and permit the students to sing the song. Public opinion, the First Amendment and common sense all support this outcome," says Jay Sekulow, chief counsel of the ACLJ.

"This decision is not only ridiculous but offensive to the many parents and students in the school who want to express their patriotism at the graduation ceremony. It appears this principal doesn't mind punishing patriotism for the sake of political correctness."

The ACLJ's protest letter, sent today to Superintendent Isabel DiMola of CEC District 21—as well as Mayor Bloomberg, Chancellor Dennis Walcott and Principal Hawkins—argues that “a student performance of ‘God Bless the USA’ at a graduation ceremony is no different than a teacher leading students in a voluntarily recitation of the Pledge of Allegiance. Both are secular activities permissible in public schools, and both serve the important purpose of furthering the principles of patriotism and self-sacrifice in a group setting.”