

School District Launched 'Religious Inquisition' Into Homeschooling Parents

A Virginia school district has decided to scrap a policy that allowed it to interrogate Christian homeschool teenagers and their parents about their religious beliefs.

Last November Douglas Pruiett and his wife received a letter from Goochland County Public Schools about updated procedures to the district's requests for religious exemptions for homeschool students.

Under the updated rules, once a child turns 14 years old, the district requires that homeschool parents reapply for a religious exemption to public education.

The Prueitts have seven children, three of whom were impacted by the revised policy.

"Each application must be completed along with a statement of your bona fide religious beliefs and a statement from your child age 14 or older stating his/her bona fide religious beliefs," the policy reads.

In other words, the homeschool kids have to prove to the school board that they love Jesus. And then there was this rather ominous paragraph:

"The School Board reserves the right to schedule a meeting with the parent(s) and, in the case of a student age 14 or older, with the student. The parent of a student younger than age 14 may choose to have his or her child attend the meeting. The purpose of the meeting is for the School Board to determine whether the request for exemption is based upon a conscientious opposition to attendance at a public school or

at a private, denominational, or parochial school due to bona fide religious training or beliefs. Such meeting will be conducted in a closed meeting of the School Board."

It sounds to me like some sort of modern-day religious inquisition—hauling Christian kids in front of the school board to be interrogated about the authenticity of their relationship with Jesus Christ.

"The policy provided the school board the right to call the child before them (and I call it interrogation) to defend those beliefs so they could determine whether indeed the child and the parents still held bona fide religious beliefs to qualify for the exemption," Prueitt said.

His immediate reaction was to reject the district's mandate—even though his refusal could have had landed the family in court. He cited the Virginia religious exemption statute, which gives families a right to an exemption from school attendance based on the religious training the parents are providing to the child—regardless of what the child believes. The local policy, he said, violates that right.

So like a good citizen, Pruiett contacted the school superintendent.

"When I spoke with the school superintendent about this issue he stated that part of the rationale in changing the policy was to allow the board to ascertain if a homeschooled child really wants to be homeschooled so that they, 'can be given the opportunity to go to public school,'" he said.

The Home School Legal Defense Association also weighed in—warning the school district they were in violation of state law and there was no legal ground to force the Pruiett family to do what they had been ordered to do.

"We are still a nation of 'We the People,'" he wrote. "If liberties are taken away, it is because we did not stand. In a

wonderful country like ours, we should desire that all our institutions and policies be characterized by a respect for individual God-given freedoms.”

And that brings us to Jan. 13th, when hundreds of parents piled into the Goochland School Board meeting to show their support for the Pruietts and other homeschool families in the community.

The school board heard the will of the people and voted to repeal the policy. They also decided to suspend any religious exemption letters that were sent to other families.

It took a village to change what was a very bad policy—but it’s proof positive that “We the People” can still engage the political process.

“The board acted honorably to repeal this thing,” Prueitt told me.

But it’s also a reminder that the government seems to believe they know what’s best for our children.

“We are Christians and we homeschool our children so that we can instill in them Christian values—from an educational standpoint so that they will acknowledge God in every discipline of life,” Pruiett told me. “You’re not going to find that in public schools.”

So let what happened in Goochland County, Virginia, serve as a warning to school boards across the fruited plain. “We the People” will not tolerate busybody school marms meddling in the private religious affairs of American school children.

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