

School Officials Demand Students Forego Rights

“As we celebrate the anniversary of the Bill of Rights, the Carmel Teens for Life Club in Indiana learned that free speech cannot be taken for granted,” said Mat Staver, Founder and Chairman of Liberty Counsel, which represents the high school students who lead the club.

On Monday, Dec. 5, 2016, Liberty Counsel sent an initial demand letter with photo attachments, outlining the unconstitutional censorship of Carmel Teens for Life by Carmel High School administrators, which removed their pre-approved poster after a student complained. The letter requested a response by Dec. 12, 2016. District counsel responded via phone on Tuesday, Dec. 6, and assured Liberty Counsel that the district was taking the letter’s concerns seriously. In addition, district counsel sent a request to the superintendent to obtain the district’s side of the story and stated that a response before Dec. 12 was unlikely. Liberty Counsel agreed to extend the timeline for a response to at least Dec. 23, before further action would be taken.

However, the district summoned the club’s leaders three days later on Friday, Dec. 9, 2016, demanding they sign an agreement that they would not seek outside legal counsel or parental input, that they would have to receive prior approval for “all communications” and that they not use the word “abortion” in any communications, including Facebook. There was also a threat to withdraw teacher sponsorship if the teens did not sign the “Agreement.”

Liberty Counsel sent an email Monday, Dec. 12, at 2:16 p.m., demanding a response and an explanation. However, Liberty Counsel received no response for over 24 hours. Liberty Counsel placed a phone call to district counsel on Tuesday,

December 13, at 3:36 p.m., seeking an explanation. However, district counsel was unavailable. With counsel unresponsive, Liberty Counsel informed the media regarding Carmel High School's actions at 4:55 p.m.

The Friday, Dec. 9 attempt to strong-arm the club behind-the-scenes was a game changer that should have received an immediate response from District. "It is highly improper for school officials to demand students forgo their rights and not seek legal counsel or parental input," said Staver.

"The district has until Monday to correct course. The district's actions are shocking. Instead of supporting the Bill of Rights, the district has trampled them. Students do not shed their rights to free speech when they enter the schoolhouse gate," said Staver. {eo}