

Dear Senators,

Please allow Mr. Kelly Coghlan to speak for us as our agent and read our testimony during this committee meeting. Thank you for taking the time to hear about the experiences my children have had in the Texas public school system. We live in Plano, Texas, so from this point on I will refer to the school system as PISD. My daughters, Bailey and Michaela, have experienced several instances of religious viewpoint discrimination during their elementary years.

When Bailey's class was instructed to write "holiday" cards to the soldiers one year, they were told not to put "Merry Christmas" or any other religious statements (God Bless You, e.g.) on the card – It "might offend someone". That seemed ironic considering they (the soldiers) were over there fighting for our freedom, yet my children's teachers were denying them theirs. If teachers ask our children to make cards – it should reflect their own personality and sentiments ... the cards should not be censored by P.I.S.D. Another instance occurred in her music class and choir rehearsal after school. When they were singing a Jewish song, Bailey asked why they were not singing Christmas songs such as Silent Night. Her teacher explained that "she did not want the grief factor and there would be too many complaints". What a shame! We trust God on our money and in our hearts, but we can't sing about His birth - what happened? We sang those songs in school and we turned out pretty good. We had Christmas parties and performed plays about the birth of Christ in my public school. We saw the "Ten Commandments" and learned to respect others who were different than ourselves because God was in the picture.

On another occasion, my other daughter Michaela's first-grade was going to have a "winter break party", so she wanted to bring her friends little "goodie bags" to distribute. I had previously listened to a radio program aired by the ACLJ (American Center for Law & Justice) during which it was stated that it was legal for children to hand out goodie bags containing Christian, Jewish, and secular items as long as there was nothing inappropriate, each bag had its own name tag with a classmate's name on it, and it was clearly from Michaela - not the school. She took her goodie bags to school that day looking forward to the party. Prior to the party, her teacher asked her what was in the bags. Michaela simply said it was a surprise for her friends. When her class went outside for recess, her teacher later informed me she had opened Michaela's bags, per the principal's instructions, to make sure there was nothing with "religious content" in them. Inside were pencils with "Jesus is the reason for the Season" printed on them, angel erasers, and candy. The principal was quickly informed apparently and called me still prior to the actual party, telling me Michaela would not be allowed to pass out her bags because it violated policy. I have discovered since that time it did, in fact, not violate any policy. PISD seems to make policy disregarding the 1st Amendment and is very arrogant to boot. I had already had other run-ins with this particular principal about religious viewpoint discrimination, so I believe she knew I would escalate this. Others up the chain-of-command told me the same thing: they did not care how I or the ACLJ interpreted the law – "get an attorney". The sad part is Michaela had to sit and watch all her friends pass out their non-offensive, PISD-approved goodie bags. This was wrong. She was very upset and I could not blame her. This happens more times than I care to

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