



# PRESS RELEASE

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## **Christian Teacher Sues New York Public School District for Restricting Her Religious Speech**

Buffalo, New York (January 10, 2013) — Today, the American Freedom Law Center (AFLC), a non-profit Judeo-Christian law firm, filed a federal civil rights lawsuit in the United States District Court for the Western District of New York on behalf of Joelle Silver, a high school teacher for the Cheektowaga Central School District, who was forced by school officials to censor her personal speech and remove all religious content from her classroom displays under threat of being terminated from her employment.

On June 22, 2012, Silver, a devout Christian who has taught in the School District for seven years, received a “counseling letter” signed by the superintendent. In the letter, the School District ordered Silver to remove all religious items from her classroom, including, among other things, a poster with an inspirational Bible verse superimposed over an American flag and school books. The School District ordered Silver to remove small, personal sticky notes that contained inspirational Bible quotes and religious messages that she kept discreetly on her desk. To add further insult, the School District informed Silver that if she needs “to occasionally glance at inspirational Bible verses between classes during the course of the day” she should “keep such material in a discreet folder that only [she] will have access to” and only “so long as [she took] precautions not to share it or disclose its content to [her] students or their parents or guardians.”

To complete the religious cleansing, the School District ordered Silver “to refrain from all other forms of communication with students during the school day (whether verbal, email, texting, written, etc.) that would conflict with your duty to show complete neutrality toward religion and to refrain from promoting religion or entangling yourself in religious matters.”

Robert Muise, AFLC Co-Founder and Senior Counsel, commented, “This is one of the most egregious examples of religious hostility I have witnessed in a public school. Ms. Silver

does not cease being a Christian nor does she shed her constitutional rights at the schoolhouse gate.”

According to the “counseling letter,” which is now a permanent part of Silver’s employment file, failure to follow any of the directions would lead to “serious disciplinary consequences, including the termination of [her] employment.”

The School District’s hostility toward Silver’s Christian faith was blatant, particularly in light of the fact that the School District permits other teachers and administrators to display in their classrooms and offices various messages and other items that reflect their personal viewpoints on a wide range of subject matter. For example, a social worker at the very same High School displays inside and outside of her office various messages that promote the “gay rights” agenda, including LGBT-themed posters and advertisements from activist organizations.

David Yerushalmi, AFLC Co-Founder and Senior Counsel, commented, “Our Nation was founded to promote religious liberty. Yet, for years our public schools have been bastions of religious hostility. That trend needs to change, and the American Freedom Law Center is committed to changing it.”

Ironically, Silver was also ordered to remove from her classroom a quote from President Ronald Reagan which stated: “Without God there is no virtue because there is no prompting of the conscience . . . without God there is a coarsening of the society; without God democracy will not and cannot long endure . . . If ever we forget that we are One Nation Under God, then we will be a Nation gone under.”

The *American Freedom Law Center* is a Judeo-Christian law firm that fights for faith and freedom. It accomplishes its mission through litigation, public policy initiatives, and related activities. It does not charge for its services. The Law Center is supported by contributions from individuals, corporations, and foundations, and is recognized by the IRS as a section 501(c)(3) organization. Visit us at [www.americanfreedomlawcenter.org](http://www.americanfreedomlawcenter.org).

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