



# FREEDOM FROM RELIGION FOUNDATION

P.O. Box 750 • Madison WI 53701 • (608) 256-8900 • www.ffrf.org

August 18, 2009

COPY

Mr. John D. Bennett  
Gilmer County Schools  
201 N Court St  
Glennville WV 26351

Re: Prayer at Gilmore County High School's 2009 Graduation Ceremony

Dear Mr. Bennett:

Our national organization, which works to protect the constitutional principle of separation between state and church, has recently become aware of a potential Establishment Clause violation at Gilmore County High School.

It is our information and understanding that the 2009 graduation ceremony at Gilmore County High School included an "Inspiration" as part of its program. This portion of the ceremony allows a student speaker to apparently give words of inspiration to his/her fellow graduates. Lora Gray, who we understand was a graduate, delivered this year's "inspiration." Our complainant informs us that her "inspiration" was really a Christian prayer. This prayer began with "let us pray" and ended with "in Jesus' name we pray." Please find enclosed a copy of the graduation program.

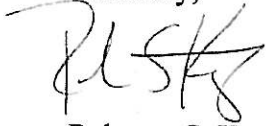
As you are aware, the Supreme Court has continually struck down prayers at school-sponsored events, including public school graduations. *See Lee v. Weisman*, 505 U.S. 577 (1992) (declaring unconstitutional clergy-delivered prayers at a public school graduation). Even if student-initiated, school officials may not invite a student, teacher, faculty member, or clergy to give any type of prayer, invocation, or benediction at a public high school graduation. *See Santa Fe Indep. Sch. Dist. v. Doe*, 530 U.S. 290 (2000) (holding that student-delivered prayers at high school football games violate the Establishment Clause). The Supreme Court has settled this matter—high school graduations must be secular to protect the freedom of conscience of all students.

We are greatly concerned that by scheduling an "inspiration" as part of the graduation ceremony, Gilmer County Schools is simply allowing an opportunity for a prayer or invocation to be given at this public school event. It certainly appears in this case that "inspiration" is really an "invocation."

We ask that you commence an immediate investigation into this allegation. We further request that you notify us in writing of the steps Gilmer County Schools is taking to

ensure that the high school is not scheduling religious practices as part of its graduations ceremony or any other school-sponsored event, including football games.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'RSK', written over a horizontal line.

Rebecca S. Kratz  
Staff Attorney

Enclosure