

FREEDOM FROM RELIGION *foundation*

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March 14, 2011

**SENT VIA FAX & U.S. MAIL
(865) 594-1627**

Dr. James P. McIntyre, Jr.
Superintendent
Knox County Schools
912 S. Gay Street
PO Box 2188
Knoxville TN 37901-2188

Re: West High School Team Chaplain

Dear Mr. McIntyre:

I am writing on behalf of concerned West High School (WHS) students, and other Tennessee members of the Freedom From Religion Foundation (FFRF), who object to the presence of a volunteer team chaplain with West High School's football team. FFRF is a national nonprofit organization with over 16,000 members across the country including nearly 200 in Tennessee. Our purpose is to protect the constitutional principle of separation between state and church.

It is our information and understanding that Mr. Graham Schulyer is a volunteer team chaplain with the WHS football team and has been for the past three years. We understand that he is a priest at Apostles Anglican Church. The appointment of a team chaplain, formal or de facto, for a public high school athletic team also violates the Constitution. A public high school football team should not employ a chaplain, seek out a spiritual leader for the team, or agree to have a volunteer team chaplain.

It is well settled that public schools may not advance or promote religion. *See generally, Santa Fe Indep. Sch. Dist. v. Doe*, 530 U.S. 290 (2001); *Lee v. Weisman*, 505 U.S. 577 (1992); *Wallace v. Jaffree*, 472 U.S. 38 (1985); *Epperson v. Arkansas*, 393 U.S. 97 (1967); *Sch. Dist. of Abington Twshp. v. Schempp*, 374 U.S. 203 (1963); *Engel v. Vitale*, 370 U.S. 421 (1962). Moreover, "the preservation and transmission of religious beliefs and worship is a responsibility and a choice committed to the private sphere." *Santa Fe Indep. Sch. Dist. v. Doe*, 530 U.S. 290, 310 (2001)(quoting *Lee v. Weisman*, 505 U.S. at 589). In *Lee v. Weisman*, 505 U.S. 577 (1992), the Supreme Court extended the prohibition of school sponsored prayers beyond the classroom to all school functions (Holding prayers at public high school graduations an impermissible establishment of religion). Therefore, a public school and its personnel cannot organize, authorize or otherwise coordinate a Christian prayer in the school. Additionally, Mr. Schulyer is known in the community as a Christian leader so allowing him to pray with the football team sends the message that the school endorses Christianity.

School endorsement of Christianity is particularly troubling for those parents and students who are not Christians or are unbelievers. The “[s]chool sponsorship of a religious message is impermissible because it sends the ancillary message to members of the audience who are nonadherents ‘that they are outsiders, not full members of the political community and accompanying message to adherents that they are insiders, favored members of the political community.’” *Santa Fe Indep. Sch. Dist. v. Doe*, 530 U.S. 290, 309-10 (2001)(quoting *Lynch v. Donnelly*, 465 U.S. at 668)(O’Connor, J., concurring).

We ask that you refrain from having a “volunteer team chaplain” at West High School, and that you ensure no other Knox County School athletic team employs or supports similar chaplains at their schools. Please notify us in writing of the steps your District has taken to remedy this matter.

Sincerely,



Rebecca S. Markert
Staff Attorney

cc: Greg Roach, Principal, West High School