



Independence Law Center (ILC) Responds to Misleading Letter from Mechanicsburg Area School District (MASD)

(Harrisburg, January 8, 2019) For Immediate Release

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Today, the Independence Law Center is correcting misleading statements issued today by the Mechanicsburg Area School District regarding the administration's unconstitutional prohibition on students sharing Bibles with other students. The misleading statements by the school district and the correction of the record by ILC are listed below:

(Red - text of MASD Letter of January 8, 2019, Black – ILC Response)

MASD: Religious Materials are Welcome at MASH:

Mechanicsburg Area School District Responds to Inaccurate Allegations from Independence Law Center

Last week we received a claim from the Independence Law Center (ILC) that the Bible was banned from Mechanicsburg Area Senior High School.

- **ILC REPLY** - MASH's statement is false, we did not claim the "Bible was banned" as the school is purposefully misstating. Independence Law Center press release explicitly states they were denied from sharing bibles:

"The student leaders of the Christians in Action Student Club (Bible Club) at Mechanicsburg Area School District were denied permission by School Principal David Harris from sharing Bibles during lunch with their classmates and friends. Not only did Principal Harris tell these students that they were 'not permitted to handout Bibles during the school day' but he also ordered that they not even hand out Bibles outside of the school day unless they were granted permission first from the school." (ILC Press release, Thursday January 3, 2019)

MASD: We have investigated the allegations from ILC and will provide a response directly to the organization. The letter and press release from the ILC are inaccurate. There is not a ban on the Bible, Torah or the Koran or any other religious material at Mechanicsburg Area Senior High School.

- **ILC REPLY** – We did not say there was a ban on religious books. There is a ban however, on passing out the Bible during the school day. (Torah or Koran or copies of the Constitution as well most likely). **Here is Principal Harris's email, sent to Bible club's advisor, in response to the club's request to share bibles with other students:**

"Please inform him that he is not permitted to handout Bibles during the school day. Like other literature if he would like to request to distribute them outside of the school day, he may submit a request which will be reviewed in accordance with district policy and case law. At that time, a

decision will be rendered. In addition to relevant case law, district policy #220 provides some guidelines. Please feel free to share this with [the student] or to review it with him as you see fit.

Thank you,
Dave [Harris]" (*MASH principal email to the Bible Club Advisor, Nov. 9, 2018*)

ILC Reply: In fact, the school's first press release doubled-down in their position that the only time students could possibly give Bibles to fellow students is before or after school, not during the school day. Their first press release read, in relevant part:

"...students do have the right to distribution of non-school materials prior to the start of the school day and after the end of the school day..." (*MASD statement, Friday, January 4, 2019*)

MASD: Students are always permitted to bring, read, share and discuss the Bible at school. We welcome and encourage students with all backgrounds and religious views to express themselves. *(emphasis added)*

- ILC REPLY: – ILC never alleged they couldn't bring or read or discuss the bible. BUT the school district explicitly denied their request to **SHARE** Bibles during lunch, and the written response is clear that there are NO times during the school day in which they could share the bible. See email text above.

MASD: There are rules any student or group must follow when they wish to formally distribute any material to other students during the instructional day, inclusive of lunch. These rules are established to respect the rights of all students, create a sense of belonging in the school, and ensure there are not disruptions to the school day. The ILC press release is misleading. The student group never submitted a formal request for distribution of Bibles, and the ILC never contacted the building administration to discuss the issue.

- **ILC REPLY** – The students went through the process of formally requesting permission, and Principal Harris wrote a response to that request. Apparently, Mr. Harris never turned over his email to the school during their investigation.

MASD: Instead of submitting a request and working with the high school administration in a collaborative manner, the ILC's approach has evoked negative emotions that divide our school and community. We would gladly engage in a conversation that instead takes the time to consider what is best and inclusive for all students and respects the wishes of many parents in our school community. It is our sincere hope to resolve this issue with facts.

- **ILC REPLY** – Again the students did a formal request which was officially denied. ILC has worked quietly behind the scenes to correct other violations of these students' rights in the past which is outlined in the Press Release and Letter dated December 31, 2018. During those prior events, ILC never disclosed the name of the school publically, not even to reporters who asked. **ILC sent the formal letter to the school administration on December 31, 2018, and received no reply from the school.** In light of past incidents, and because of the pattern of violations the school has engaged in, a press release was sent out four days later, on January 3rd 2019.