**November 21, 2024**

Dear **[School Administrator]**,

I am writing to express my serious concerns about the State Superintendent’s continued efforts to insert a particular religious and political perspective into our public schools. As a member of our community, I respectfully ask you to join the other Oklahoma district leaders who have said clearly and publicly they will not comply with unlawful mandates that violate the constitutionally-granted and -guaranteed rights of students and families, like mine.

As a school administrator and government official, you have the power – and responsibility – to act in support of all families’ religious freedom and to uphold the religious neutrality that is required of you and essential to maintaining a safe and noncoercive learning environment “free from sectarian control” for all children and teens.

The U.S. Supreme Court has ruled the government should be “particularly vigilant” in ensuring schools do not promote religious views that may conflict with the beliefs of students and their families. I urge you now, in your capacity as a school leader, to be particularly vigilant and responsive to any effort to espouse sectarian views in our public schools, which exist to serve ALL students, no matter their religious beliefs or lack thereof. Here are a few recent examples that have been brought to my attention:

* the State Superintendent ‘s June 27 mandate that every public school in Oklahoma “incorporate the Bible, which includes the Ten Commandments,” into curriculum for grades 5-12 and his subsequent purchase of “God Bless the USA” Bibles to be used in AP Government classrooms;
* the State Superintendents' July 9 announcement of an overtly partisan Executive Review Committee to “overhaul” Oklahoma’s social studies standards and “incorporate the introduction of the Bible as an instructional resource”; and
* the State Superintendent’s November 12 announcement of the establishment of a taxpayer-funded “Office of Religious Liberty and Patriotism” and an accompanying video that was required to be screened for all students and included a Christian prayer.

The State Superintendent has made his political and religious views clear. He has been able to do so because we are all afforded freedom of speech. *Importantly, though, no one has the right to impose their personal beliefs on others*. As Oklahoma Attorney General Gentner Drummon said of the State Superintendent’s latest overreach: **“Not only is this edict unenforceable, it is contrary to parents’ rights, local control, and individual free-exercise rights.”**

As you know, the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution already protects individuals’ right to freely exercise religion, including the right of students to pray at school. But directing students to pray – or coercing them into being prayed at – is unacceptable and flies in the face of their rights and the rights of their parents.

The First Amendment also requires that the government make no law respecting the establishment of religion. By favoring a specific religion – its perspectives, prayers, or texts – you risk running afoul of state and federal laws. By remaining silent on the matter, you risk alienating students and families who do not adhere to the particular beliefs being favored and promoted by the State Superintendent.

Oklahoma law is clear that school districts, not the State Superintendent, have the exclusive authority to determine which instructional materials will be used. And as a government official, you have a legal and moral obligation to not merely *tolerate* perspectives different from your own (or from the State Superintendent’s) but to *actively protect* the rights of students to explore and express alternative views.

For example, students have the right to engage in peaceful, non-disruptive protest. They have a right to abstain from “patriotic” exercises, including participating in the Pledge of Allegiance or the national anthem. They have a right to learn in a safe environment that is free from indoctrination, coercion, religious privilege, exclusion or intimidation. And just as students have a right to pray, they also have the freedom not to. Religious freedom is for ALL Oklahomans, no matter their religion.

In light of the State Superintendent’s recent actions, our community deserves and demands certain reassurances from our school leaders. Please publicly pledge that you will use your authority in support of students’ rights and religious freedom for all, not abuse it in support of unconstitutional mandates that favor any one religion over all others, or religion in general over nonreligion.

I know how hard you and your teachers work every day on behalf of our students, and I thank you for that. It is my sincerest hope that, under your leadership, our schools will maintain their focus on providing a high-quality, nonsectarian, and nonpartisan educational experience for all students that is compliant with state and federal laws.

Respectfully,

**[Your Name]**

**[Your Title & Location]**