



Written by [Dave Bohon](#) on October 23, 2012

## Judge Rules for Texas Cheerleaders in Bible Banner Lawsuit

Cheerleaders at a Texas high school were awarded an injunction on October 18 by a district judge, allowing them to continue displaying Bible verses on banners during school football games. Officials with the school district of Kountze, Texas, had forced the cheerleaders to stop using the banners — which bear Bible verses like “If God be for us who can be against us” — after the atheist Freedom From Religion Foundation (FFRF) warned the district that the banners may prompt a First Amendment lawsuit. As it has done in dozens of cases, the godless busybodies had convinced the officials that the students were violating the First Amendment’s supposed requirement of separation of church and state.



Kevin Weldon, the school’s superintendent, told reporters that his decision to ban the banners was “not a personal opinion of mine. My personal convictions are that I am a Christian as well. But I’m also a state employee and Kountze ISD representative. And I was advised that [displaying religious signs] would be in direct violation of United State Supreme Court decisions.”

As reported previously in [The New American](#), the Liberty Institute, which is representing the students, persuaded a county judge to issue a temporary restraining order allowing the students to continue displaying their banners. In addition, Texas Attorney General Greg Abbott sent a letter to Weldon and the school board telling them that they were out of line in prohibiting the banners, pointing out that “the Supreme Court has never ruled that religion must be ‘kept out’ of public schools.”

That restraining order was followed up on October 18 with the injunction by Judge Steve Thomas, who ruled that the cheerleaders could continue displaying the Christian-themed banners while a lawsuit against the school district ban prepares for trial next June.

The FFRF expressed its disappointment in the judge’s ruling, with spokesman Dan Barker saying that the banners are part of a “climate of intolerance” coming against non-religious residents of the city. Similarly, the secular Anti-Defamation League issued a statement registering its displeasure over the ruling. “Public schools are for children of all faiths or no faith, and these banners were clearly being displayed in the context of school-sponsored activities,” said the group. “Faith is a profoundly personal decision, so students should not be subjected to an exclusionary school-sponsored religious message on campus or be forced to choose between attending quintessential school events — football games — or being subjected to an unwanted religious message.”

Thomas Brandt, the school district’s attorney, also disagreed with the judge’s opinion, telling reporters that “it’s hard to say that this is the individual free speech rights of the individual cheerleaders rather than something that’s a sponsored school event.”

But Liberty Institute attorney David Starnes said that the banners do indeed represent “the individual



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speech of the cheerleaders and [are] not in fact the government speaking. It is not just one girl or one person in the group that comes up with the quote. But it's on a rotating basis that each girl gets to pick the quote. That is their individual voices that are being portrayed on the banner."

Attorney General Abbott, who had earlier filed court documents to intervene on behalf of the students, issued a statement following the injunction saying that the freedom of the students "to express their religious views adds to the diversity of thought that has made this country so strong." Mike Johnson, a spokesman with the attorney general's office, added that "if you're in the hallway between classes, or you happen to be on a football field, and you are a student, you are still an American citizen. You don't shed your rights to free speech, and that's why this is protected. Here we have a quintessential example of student-led, student-initiated free speech. That's why it's completely protected by the Constitution." Texas Governor Rick Perry issued his own comment on the favorable court decision, calling it "a victory for all who cherish our inalienable right to freedom of speech and religious expression. I am proud of the cheerleaders at Kountze ISD for standing firm in the knowledge of these endowed rights and their willingness to be an example in defending those rights, which a secular group has needlessly tried to take away."

Some of the high school's 18 cheerleaders added their own excitement over the judge's ruling in their favor. "I'm really excited, I'm thankful," Rebekah Richardson was quoted by [CBN News](#) as saying. She added that it was a worthy cause to fight for. "I think it is because it's the Word of God, and that's worth a lot."

Added cheerleader Kieara Moffett: "I feel good. I feel like a huge weight has been lifted off my shoulders as of right now."

Another of the school's cheerleaders, 15-year-old Macy Matthews, told reporters that the banner for that week's football game would read: "All things which are impossible with men are possible with God."



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