



Written by [Michael Tennant](#) on April 2, 2022

Massachusetts School Board Won't Allow New Christian School Because of Its Beliefs, Attorneys Say

A Massachusetts school board has repeatedly delayed approving a church's application to open a private school because of the church's religious beliefs, attorneys for the church claim.

The Vida Real Internacional church, which consists largely of Hispanic immigrants, applied to the Somerville School Committee in September, requesting permission to open a faith-based school in Somerville called the Real Life Learning Center (RLLC). (Massachusetts law requires private schools to gain pre-approval from their local school boards.)



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According to a [letter](#) to the Somerville school superintendent and board from Ryan Gardner of the First Liberty Institute and Andrew Beckwith of the Massachusetts Family Institute, the committee waited two months to tell Vida Real "its application was deficient and needed to be resubmitted."

That was just the beginning of a long process of delays and requests for more information. In February, a subcommittee submitted a list of 35 questions to which it wanted the church to respond at its next meeting. Some of the questions asked for information Vida Real had already provided, while others delved into its religious beliefs.

Despite the church's accommodation of these demands, the committee continued to drag its feet and "repeatedly expressed hostility to Vida Real's religious beliefs," the church alleges. The subcommittee submitted a report to the committee questioning "how the [school's] application process will result in a diverse set of applicants" and taking issue with "the school's position on homosexuality and creationism" and its "belief that mental illness is caused by sin and demons."

"Overall," the subcommittee wrote, "the school was entirely contrary to the values of [Somerville Public Schools] and the idea of educating the whole child as being inclusive."

The letter says that three weeks later, when the subcommittee again met to consider Vida Real's application,

Ms. Sara Dion, in particular, made several comments expressing overt hostility against Vida Real based solely upon its religious beliefs. Specifically, Ms. Dion: (1) equated teaching sincerely-held religious beliefs regarding creationism to teaching that "2 + 2 = 5" and described creationism as being "factually incorrect"; (2) stated she "would not be able to look herself in the mirror" if a school teaching according to Vida Real's religious beliefs were allowed to open; (3) criticized RLLC's desire to admit only Christians and RLLC's heavy reliance upon books written from a Christian perspective; (4) reiterated previous hostile comments regarding Vida Real's beliefs regarding counseling and sexual morality;



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and (5) falsely accused Vida Real of condemning certain students as being “evil” because of its desire to teach consistent with its religious beliefs. Equally troubling, Ms. Dion stated that denying RLLC’s application was the “morally right thing to do” and that the Committee should do “everything [it] could” to prevent RLLC from opening regardless of what the law requires. She even went as far as to state that spending money on costly litigation to prevent or delay RLLC’s opening was “well worth it.”

The subcommittee ultimately recommended denying the application. The full committee will consider the application this month.

In their missive, Gardner and Beckwith point out that under Massachusetts law, the school board has little choice but to approve RLLC’s application. The school has demonstrated that its facilities are safe and that it is using a nationally known curriculum that is at least as good as that offered in Somerville’s public schools. State law specifically prohibits boards from denying applications “on account of religious teaching.”

Moreover, they note, while “Massachusetts’ diversity requirements do not apply to RLLC as a private school..., Vida Real anticipates RLLC will be a largely Latino school whose course[s] will be taught in both English and Spanish. Any suggestion that RLLC will not be a diverse school raises serious concerns regarding the Committee using this application process to discriminate against Vida Real based on the race, ethnicity, and national origin of its anticipated student body.”

In a statement to [CBN News](#), the school superintendent and committee chairman said they “disagree with the characterizations in that letter of the Committee’s communications with the RLLC to date and of the appropriateness and lawfulness of the Committee’s review of the RLLC application.”

“The Committee will complete its review of the RLLC application in a timely manner and issue a determination on the merits of the application,” concluded the statement.

“Timely” had better mean “by April 18,” because, according to the letter, if the application is not approved by then, “Vida Real will pursue all available legal options.” And, it warns, “government officials who violate clearly established laws ... may be held individually liable for their violations.”



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