



Written by [Bob Adelman](#) on July 23, 2023

After-school Bible Club Wins Discrimination Claim in Rhode Island

After two years of deliberate delaying, the Providence Public School District in Providence, Rhode Island, [consented](#) last week to treat an after-school Bible club on the same terms as the Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, and Girls on the Run.

Following the Covid shutdown that closed the schools, a group called the Child Evangelism Fellowship (CEF) tried to restart its after-school program in August 2021.

The school was having none of it, and one of the school's officials, Nick Figueroa, chief of Family and Community Engagement, systematically delayed, stalled, and dithered, putting off the CEF from restarting.

Figueroa wouldn't respond to repeated requests from CEF to allow the group to restart the program that they had operated in years past, and when he finally did respond, it was only to add additional requirements and demands that he said were needed before granting approval.

Liberty Counsel, a public interest law firm, got involved, sending letters to the district demanding that the district treat CEF just as it did the Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, and Girls on the Run, which the district happily and readily approved.

Still, Figueroa dithered.

Finally, in March, Liberty Counsel [filed suit](#):

For nearly two years, Defendant Providence Public School District has blocked Plaintiff CEF Rhode Island from hosting its elementary school Good News Clubs in District facilities that are open to other organizations.

The District's policies of unequal access and hostility to CEF Rhode Island's religious message violate the Constitution and have denied the District's elementary school students access to free, positive, and character-building Good News Clubs that enrich countless student's lives in other Rhode Island school districts and throughout the country.

The lawsuit declared that the district's inaction, through Figueroa's delay tactics, was discriminatory and unconstitutional under the speech, establishment, and free exercise clauses of the First Amendment. It also violated the Equal Protection clause of the Fourteenth Amendment.

CEF sought a trial. A week before that was scheduled to begin, the judge in the case, U.S. District Court Judge Mary McElroy, [ordered the warring parties](#) to settle their differences, or else the trial would begin.



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That's when serious negotiations began, and the consent decree was filed on July 19. The district agreed to terms favorable to CEF, which included "reasonable attorney fees" to Liberty Counsel:

The Parties agree that Providence Public School District is required, under the First Amendment, to provide Child Evangelism Fellowship access to District facilities that is equal to and on the same terms as other similarly situated nonreligious organizations [i.e., the Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, and Girls on the Run] offering programs to students in the District.

Mat Staver, founder and chairman of Liberty Counsel, [called the consent agreement](#) a "great victory":

This is a great victory for Child Evangelism Fellowship and the students and parents of the Providence School District.

Public schools cannot discriminate against Christian viewpoints regarding use of school facilities.

Child Evangelism Fellowship gives children a biblically based education that includes moral and character development. Good News Clubs should be in every public elementary school.

But is it a "great victory"? Or is it just a tiny clawing back of freedoms lost over the decades following Supreme Court decisions rendered in the '60s taking prayer and the Bible out of schools?

There was a time in the history of the American Republic when its foundational principles, based on the Bible and the Christian religion, were celebrated and revered. But years and decades of attacks by atheists, socialists, and communists bent on changing that republic into a democracy — and then into a dictatorship — bereft of those principles have so eroded those foundations that the consent decree rendered in a small school district in a tiny state is now declared a "great victory."



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