



Written by [Dave Bohon](#) on August 14, 2012

## Superintendent Defies Atheist Group; School Band Will Play “God Bless America”

The superintendent of the Wayland, Massachusetts, school district has thumbed his nose at the atheist Freedom From Religion Foundation (FFRF), saying that he will continue to allow the Wayland High School band to play “[God Bless America](#)” at patriotic-themed events at the school. The classic patriotic [Irving Berlin](#) song, made famous during World War II by [Kate Smith](#) and sung with the same gusto by millions of Americans ever since, was played by the school band both on Pearl Harbor Day and Memorial Day, prompting a letter of warning from the FFRF, after a parent of a student supposedly complained about the song.



The atheist group, which is notorious for threatening school districts and municipalities with lawsuits under the (usually accurate) assumption that the local government entities will be too intimidated to mount a challenge, insisted that the school district was somehow violating the First Amendment’s supposed separation-of-church-and-state clause by allowing the music.

But the Wayland school district’s superintendent, Dr. Paul Stein, told the [Metro West Daily News](#) that while he could appreciate where the atheist attack group is coming from, he considered its intrusion a step over the line. “There has to be a sense about whether the schools are fostering the promotion or practice of religion, and I don’t believe the band playing ‘God Bless America’ does that,” he said. In her letter to Stein, FFRF attorney Rebecca Markert pointed out that the song’s first verse ends with the stanza: “As we raise our voices in a solemn prayer.” Ignoring the fact that the school band only played the music, and no potentially offending words were sung, Markert nonetheless admonished that “a prayer conceived, hosted, and advocated by a publicly supported school does not pass constitutional muster. The repeated use of the song sends a message to students that the school is endorsing and compelling belief in a god.” According to the [Daily News](#), “Markert asked Stein to imagine the ‘consternation’ that would result if the students played ‘Allah Bless America.’” Markert advised the head school official that “there are many other patriotic songs that are secular and that would be suitable for a school setting.”

During a school board meeting in which the FFRF threat was discussed, Stein emphasized that “I don’t dismiss these concerns, I respect these concerns.... Where I would draw the line is obviously different from where this organization would draw the line.” He added that while there were circumstances where he thought mentioning God in a public school setting would be inappropriate, the case in question was not one of those. “It’s clearly within a very patriotic song, and many patriotic songs have some reference to a deity,” he said. He added his concern that “if a school system were to totally prohibit any reference to God it could actually create a hostility to God, which you’re also not allowed to do” — a point that apparently does not concern the Freedom From Religion folks.

Kris Mineau, president of the [Massachusetts Family Institute](#), called FFRF’s latest campaign “the



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theater of the absurd. 'God Bless America' is right in line with 'The Star-Spangled Banner.' Are we going to strike down the national anthem?" Of course, the answer to that question is that if possible, the FFRF would likely do exactly that.

The state pro-family leader applauded the district's decision to stand up to the atheist attack group. "FFRF is absolutely a bully," Mineau said. "There is no place in our culture for this type of activity." Matt Staver of the conservative legal advocacy group [Liberty Counsel](#) noted that "the good news is the administrators here at this school also think this is over the top, that this is just beyond the line of reasonableness. To say that you cannot sing 'God Bless America' is just preposterous." Staver told [OneNewsNow](#) that he hoped people would come to realize that the FFRF's agenda "is an anti-freedom agenda and it is an anti-God agenda.... I think this illustrates just how far they want to go. I think they have reached the tipping point in many respects, and I think they're showing their true colors."



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