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Oklahoma Supreme Court blocks Superintendent Ryan Walters' attempts to purchase Bibles and Bible-infused instructional materials

Affiliate: [ACLU of Oklahoma](#)

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Oklahoma City – In a victory for religious freedom, public education and church-state separation, the Oklahoma Supreme Court today temporarily blocked Oklahoma Superintendent of Public Instruction Ryan Walters and the Oklahoma State Department of Education (OSDE) from spending taxpayer dollars on Bibles and Bible-infused instructional materials. The order came in the lawsuit *Rev. Lori Walke v. Ryan Walters*, which was filed in October 2024 on behalf of 32 Oklahoma families, teachers and faith leaders.

The plaintiffs are represented by Americans United for Separation of Church and State, the American Civil Liberties Union, the ACLU of Oklahoma Foundation, the Freedom From Religion Foundation and Oklahoma Appleseed Center for Law & Justice.

The Court’s order temporarily stayed “work on any new request by the OSDE for the purchase of Bibles.” In addition, the order paused work on a request for proposals issued by OSDE on February 21, 2025. This request for proposals sought suppliers for “supplemental instructional materials that effectively integrate the Bible and character education into elementary-level social studies curriculum.”

The organizations representing the plaintiffs will continue fighting Walters’ Bible-education mandate and additional filings are expected soon.

They issued the following joint statement on the win:

“This victory is an important step toward protecting the religious freedom of every student and parent in Oklahoma. Superintendent Ryan Walters has been abusing his power and the court checked those abuses today. Our diverse coalition of families and clergy remains united against Walters’s extremism and in favor of a core First Amendment principle: the separation of church and state.

Learn More About the Issues in This Press Release

Government Funding of Religion

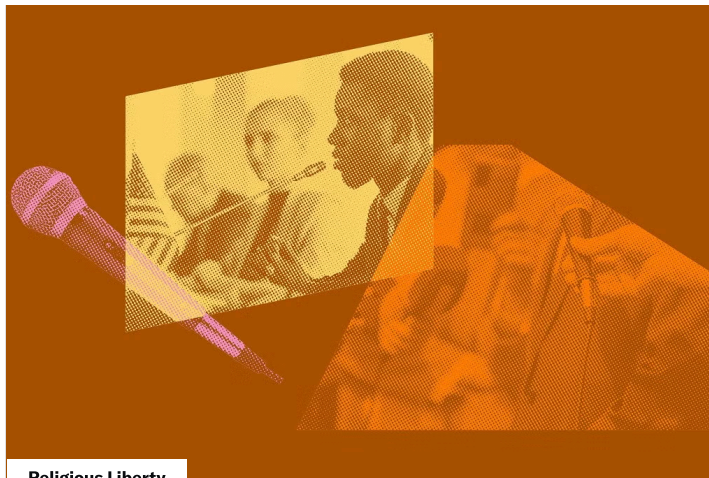
Government Promotion of Religion

Religious Liberty

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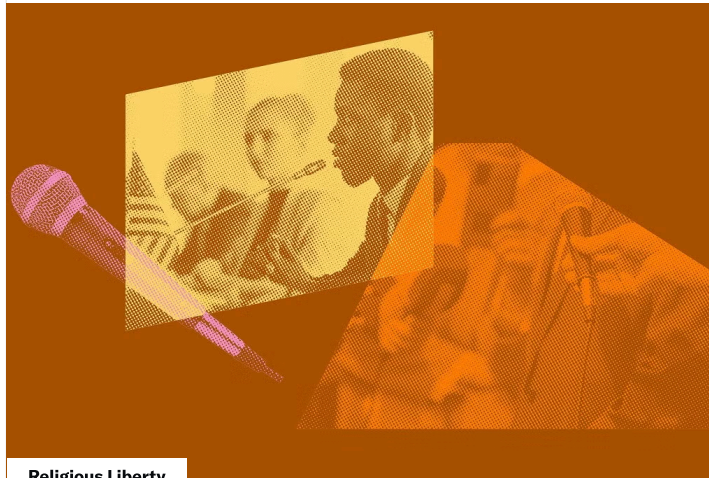


Religious Liberty

Oklahoma families, teachers, and clergy seek to block unconstitutional religious public school

OKLAHOMA CITY, Okla. — In support of church-state separation and public education, a predominantly Jewish group of seven Oklahoma taxpayers – including families with children attending public schools, teachers and clergy – filed a motion today in federal court seeking to intervene in a lawsuit brought by the National Ben Gamla Jewish Charter School Foundation. This religious organization is trying to open the nation’s first religious public charter school in Oklahoma – a clear violation of state and federal law that defines charter schools as public schools that must be secular and open to all students. Like all public schools, charter schools cannot lawfully indoctrinate religion or discriminate. But Ben Gamla’s charter school application makes clear that Jewish religious teachings will be integrated into “every dimension of . . . life” at the school, including classroom instruction and other activities. Additionally, Ben Gamla’s application indicates that the school plans to exclude students and staff who do not share its faith. Ben Gamla’s application states that “[a]dmission assumes the student and family willingness to adhere with respect to the beliefs, expectations, policies, and procedures of the school.” Because the school would promote the beliefs of a specific religion, students and families outside that faith would effectively be excluded on the taxpayer’s dime. And Ben Gamla’s application further states that the school may base employment decisions on religion. The public school families are seeking to join the lawsuit, *The National Ben Gamla Jewish Charter School Foundation, Inc. v. Drummond*, to oppose Ben Gamla’s effort to force Oklahoma to authorize and fund an unconstitutional religious public charter school. They object to their tax dollars funding a public charter school that will indoctrinate students into a particular religion, in violation of Oklahoma and federal law and our nation’s longstanding commitment to the separation of church and state. They also object to public funds being diverted from their nonreligious and inclusive public schools – which already face serious resource limitations – to a religious school that plans to discriminate based on religion. These taxpayers are asking the U.S. District Court for the Western District of Oklahoma to allow them to participate in the case in order to safeguard their interests in public education, religious freedom and church-state separation. “Public education is a foundation of our pluralistic society, and it is worth protecting,” said proposed intervenor Rabbi Dan Kaiman, Principal Rabbi of Congregation B’nai Emunah in Tulsa, Okla., and the parent of two public school students. “I care deeply about Jewish education, but our community does not need or want the government’s help to pass our values on to our children. The separation of church and state is what protects every faith community, including my own.” “My family is Jewish. We know firsthand that people of all faiths are best served when public schools don’t impose one idea of religion over others,” said Kara Joy McKee,

another proposed intervenor and parent of a public school student. “A religious public charter school would undermine religious freedom and drain tax dollars from schools that are welcoming to students of all faiths, families, and backgrounds.” The proposed intervenors are represented by Americans United for Separation of Church and State, the Oklahoma Appleseed Center for Law and Justice, Education Law Center, the American Civil Liberties Union, and Freedom From Religion Foundation. Many of these organizations represented Oklahomans who challenged the first attempt to establish a religious charter school in their state, which the Oklahoma Supreme Court declared unconstitutional two years ago. “Our clients are seeking to vindicate the age-old, basic constitutional principle that religious schools can’t be public schools, and public schools can’t be religious,” said Daniel Mach, Director of the ACLU Program on Freedom of Religion and Belief. “That vital protection, guaranteed by both Oklahoma and federal law, helps ensure that public education remains available to all students, free from religious pressure or discrimination.” “The courts, Oklahoma public school families and taxpayers, and Jewish leaders in the state all have rejected the creation of the nation’s first religious public school,” said Americans United President and CEO Rachel Laser. “We’re proud to represent Oklahomans who won’t let a religious organization backed by Christian Nationalists strong-arm the people of Oklahoma into violating the Constitution’s promises of religious freedom and church-state separation.” “Oklahoma kids and families deserve public schools that embrace everyone,” noted Oklahoma Appleseed Interim Executive Director Brent Rowland. “That includes respecting the religious freedom of every child and family rather than imposing a government-supported religious viewpoint on students, regardless of what the viewpoint is. We’re grateful for partners and for Oklahomans who steadfastly insist on religious freedom within every public school — whether neighborhood or charter — and stand against diversion of public school resources to establish religious schools.” “There is a concerted effort underway to demolish the church-state separation and antidiscrimination guarantees that are crucial parts of this nation’s public school system,” said Jessica Levin, Litigation Director at Education Law Center. “The Oklahoma Supreme Court has declared religious charter schools unconstitutional, but just two years later we must defend against them once more. We will never stop fighting to protect and strengthen the public education opportunities that are the bedrock of our democracy.” “We’re honored to be part of this pushback against religious imposition,” said Freedom From Religion Foundation Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor. “The public school system must remain secular — and we’ll do our utmost to ensure that.” Ben Gamla’s lawsuit was filed less than two weeks after Oklahoma Attorney General Gentner Drummond filed a lawsuit in state court arguing that the Oklahoma Statewide Charter School Board intentionally and improperly manipulated the administrative record of its denial of Ben Gamla’s application in a manner designed to aid Ben Gamla’s litigation position. Concern about statements by a majority of the board’s members expressing disagreement with state law prohibiting religious public charter schools is one reason that the proposed intervenors are seeking to participate in Ben Gamla’s lawsuit. Americans United Associate Vice President and Associate Legal Director Alex J. Luchenitser is the lead attorney for the proposed intervenors, representing them together with AU Constitutional Litigation Fellow Luke Anderson; Brent Rowland and Morgan Bandy of Oklahoma Appleseed Center for Law and Justice; Dan Mach and Heather L. Weaver of the ACLU; Jessica Levin, Wendy Lecker, Patrick Cremin, and Katrina Reichert of Education Law Center; and Nancy A. Noet and Samuel T. Grover of Freedom From Religion Foundation. A link to the filing can be found here: <https://assets.aclu.org/live/uploads/2026/04/Ben-Gamla-Intervention-Filing.pdf>



Religious Liberty

Court Permanently Blocks Arkansas Law Requiring Ten Commandments in Every Public School Classroom and Library

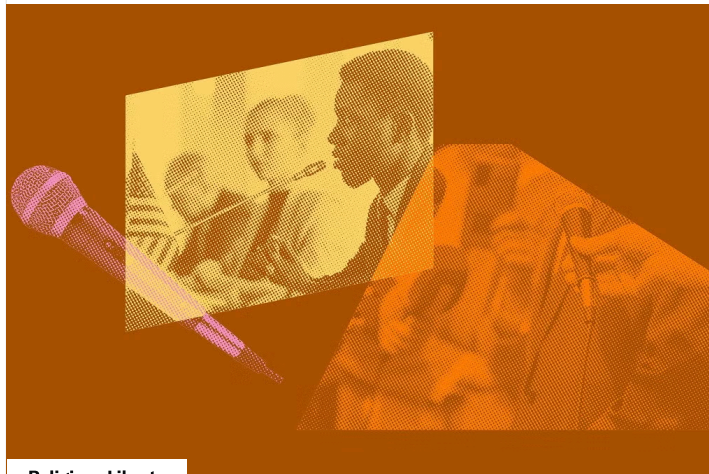
FAYETTEVILLE, Ark. – In a victory for religious freedom and church-state separation, a federal district court issued a permanent injunction today in *Stinson v. Fayetteville School District No. 1*, prohibiting the school district defendants from implementing an Arkansas law that requires all public schools to permanently display a government-chosen, Protestant version of the Ten Commandments in every classroom and library. In his decision U.S. District Court Judge Timothy Brooks wrote, “Act 573 must be permanently enjoined. Failing to do so would violate the Establishment Clause rights of all Arkansas public-school children and their parents and also violate Plaintiffs’ Free Exercise rights.” Ruling that the law would lead to unconstitutional religious coercion of the child plaintiffs and interfere with their parents’ rights to direct their children’s religious education, Brooks explained: “Act 573’s purpose is only to display a sacred, religious text in a prominent place in every public-school classroom. And the only reason to display a sacred, religious text in every classroom is to proselytize to children. The State has said the quiet part out loud.” Brooks added: “Nothing could possibly justify hanging the Ten Commandments—with or without historical context—in a calculus, chemistry, French, or woodworking class, to name a few. And the words ‘curriculum,’ ‘school board,’ ‘teacher,’ or ‘educate’ don’t appear anywhere in Act 573. Accordingly, there is no need to strain our minds to imagine a constitutional display mandated by Act 573. One doesn’t exist.” “Act 573 is a direct infringement of our religious-freedom rights, and we’re pleased that the court ruled in our favor,” said Samantha Stinson, who is a plaintiff in the case along with her husband, Jonathan Stinson. “The version of the Ten Commandments mandated by Act 573 conflicts with our family’s Jewish tenets and practice, and our belief that our children should receive their religious instruction at home and within our faith community, not from government officials.” “Today’s ruling is a resounding affirmation that public schools are not Sunday schools. The Constitution protects every student’s right to learn free from government-imposed religious doctrine,” said John C. Williams, legal director for ACLU of Arkansas. “Arkansas lawmakers cannot sidestep the First Amendment by mandating that a particular version of the Ten Commandments be displayed in every classroom. As the court recognized, this law served no educational purpose and instead placed the authority of the state behind a specific religious message. We’re grateful that the court has permanently blocked this unconstitutional law and protected the religious freedom of Arkansas students and families of all faiths and none.” “Today’s decision ensures that our clients’ classrooms will

remain spaces where all students, regardless of their faith, feel welcomed and can learn without worrying that they do not live up to the state's preferred religious beliefs," said Heather L. Weaver, senior counsel for the ACLU's Program on Freedom of Religion and Belief. "Today's decision honors the Constitution's promise of church-state separation and religious freedom," said Rachel Laser, president and CEO of Americans United for Separation of Church and State. "It will ensure that Arkansas families – not politicians or public-school officials – get to decide how and when their children engage with religion." "We are delighted that reason and our secular Constitution have prevailed, and that children will be spared this unconstitutional proselytizing," said Annie Laurie Gaylor, co-president of the Freedom From Religion Foundation. "Our public schools exist to educate, not to evangelize a captive audience." "Today's thoughtful decision reinforces a bedrock principle of our constitutional system: the government may not compel adherence to any religious doctrine," said Jon Youngwood, co-chair of Simpson Thacher's Litigation Department. "This ruling is a critical affirmation of the First Amendment rights of students and families to decide for themselves whether—and in what ways—they engage with religion." The injunction, issued by the U.S. District Court for the Western District of Arkansas, permanently prohibits the school-district defendants, including Bentonville School District No. 6, Conway School District, Fayetteville School District No. 1, Lakeside School District No. 9, Siloam Springs School Dist. No. 21, and Springdale School District No. 50, from "complying with Act 573." Last year, the court issued a preliminary injunction temporarily barring the school district defendants from displaying the Ten Commandments in classrooms and libraries. Represented by the American Civil Liberties Union of Arkansas, the ACLU, Americans United for Separation of Church and State, and the Freedom from Religion Foundation, with Simpson Thacher & Bartlett LLP serving as pro bono counsel, the plaintiffs in *Stinson v. Fayetteville School District No. 1* are a group of 10 multifaith and nonreligious Arkansas families with children in public schools.

Affiliate: Arkansas

Press Release

Feb 2026



Religious Liberty

Fifth Circuit: Too Soon to Rule on Constitutionality of Louisiana Law Requiring Public Schools to Display Ten Commandments

NEW ORLEANS – The Fifth U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals ruled today that it is premature to determine the constitutionality of House Bill 71, a Louisiana law requiring public schools to permanently display a government-approved, Protestant version of the Ten Commandments in every classroom. The decision vacates a federal district court's

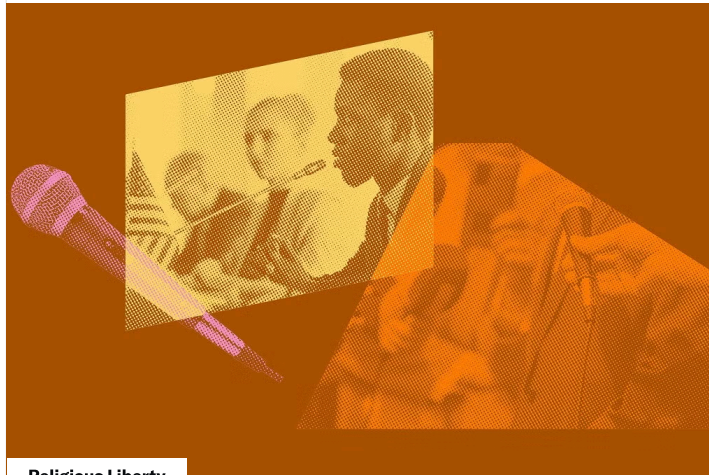
November 2024 preliminary injunction in *Rev. Roake v. Brumley*, which prevented the defendant state officials and school boards from implementing the law. In its ruling, the appeals court held that the Roake lawsuit was premature because the scriptural displays had not yet been posted in the children plaintiffs' classrooms, so it "cannot yet know . . . how the text will be used." The court acknowledged, however, that "nothing in today's narrow holding prevents future as-applied challenges once the statute is implemented and a concrete factual record exists." Represented by the ACLU, ACLU of Louisiana, Americans United for Separation of Church and State, and the Freedom From Religion Foundation, with Simpson Thacher & Bartlett LLP serving as pro bono counsel, the plaintiffs in *Roake v. Brumley* are a multifaith group of nine Louisiana families with children in public schools. The organizations representing the plaintiffs issued the following statement in response to the decision: "Today's ruling is extremely disappointing and would unnecessarily force Louisiana's public school families into a game of constitutional whack-a-mole in every school district. Longstanding judicial precedent makes clear that our clients need not submit to the very harms they are seeking to prevent before taking legal action to protect their rights. But this fight isn't over. We will continue fighting for the religious freedom of Louisiana's families." The appeals court's opinion today does not address the lawsuit *Rabbi Nathan v. Alamo Heights Independent School District* that challenges a similar law in Texas, Senate Bill 10. The court, sitting en banc, heard oral arguments in both cases on Jan. 20. Plaintiffs' legal counsel is exploring all legal pathways forward to continue the fight against this unconstitutional law. A copy of the ruling can be found here: <https://assets.aclu.org/live/uploads/2026/02/Roake-Fifth-Circuit-en-banc-decision.pdf>

Court Case: *Rev. Roake v. Brumley*

Affiliate: Louisiana

Press Release

Feb 2026



Religious Liberty

Civil Rights Groups Urge Oklahoma Officials to Reject Application for Ben Gamla Religious Public Charter School

OKLAHOMA CITY — A coalition of civil rights organizations today urged the Oklahoma Statewide Charter School Board to reject Ben Gamla Jewish Charter School's application to form the nation's first religious public charter school, which would be a flagrant violation of Oklahomans' religious freedom and the constitutional promise of church-state separation, as well as Oklahoma's guarantee that public schools be open to all. In a letter to the board, the coalition explained the many ways Ben Gamla's proposed school would violate state and

federal law by indoctrinating students in a specific religion and discriminating against students, staff, and, potentially, parents. The groups also pointed to substantial deficiencies in required elements throughout the application. The letter was authored by Americans United for Separation of Church and State, the American Civil Liberties Union, Education Law Center, Freedom From Religion Foundation and Oklahoma Appleseed Center for Law and Justice. Most of these organizations represented Oklahoma public school advocates, parents, and faith leaders in a 2023 lawsuit to block Oklahoma from creating and funding St. Isidore of Seville Catholic Virtual School, a proposed religious public charter school that was ruled unconstitutional by the Oklahoma Supreme Court in 2024, a decision the U.S. Supreme Court let stand in 2025. In today's letter, the groups detail how Ben Gamla's proposal would similarly violate the U.S. Constitution, the Oklahoma Constitution, the Oklahoma Charter Schools Act and the board's own regulations, which make clear that charter schools are public schools that must be secular and open to all students and cannot use religion as a license to discriminate in admissions or employment. "Establishing the nation's first religious public school would be a dangerous sea change for American democracy," said Rachel Laser, president and CEO of Americans United. "We urge the board to protect public education and the religious freedom of Oklahoma taxpayers and students by rejecting Ben Gamla's application. Public schools aren't and should never be religious schools." "The very idea of a religious public school is a constitutional oxymoron," said Daniel Mach, director of the ACLU Program on Freedom of Religion and Belief. "We hope the board rejects this application and safeguards the religious liberty of Oklahoma students, families, and taxpayers." "Although the Oklahoma Supreme Court has already made crystal clear that a religious charter school would violate the law, we are again faced with the need to oppose the establishment and public funding of such a school in the state," said Jessica Levin, litigation director at Education Law Center. "We are proud to stand with a large and diverse group of people in Oklahoma and across the country who will fight to maintain a secular public education system that is open to all and rejects discrimination of any kind." "Public charter schools are public schools, and public schools must be secular," said Annie Laurie Gaylor, co-president of the Freedom From Religion Foundation. "Allowing a religious charter school would open the door to government-funded religious indoctrination and discrimination, undermining the religious freedom of students, families and taxpayers alike. Oklahoma has already seen where this road leads, and there is no lawful basis to repeat that mistake." "Public dollars should strengthen public schools that welcome every child, not be diverted to religious institutions that exclude or indoctrinate," said Brent Rowland, interim executive director and legal director at Oklahoma Appleseed. "The Constitution's separation of church and state protects both religious freedom and public education. When the state funds a religious charter school, it violates that promise and drains scarce resources from the neighborhood public schools that most Oklahoma families rely on. At a moment when our communities are desperate for meaningful investment in public education, Oklahoma officials should reject this application and uphold the constitutional guardrails that serve all students." Attorneys authoring the letter include Alex J. Luchenitser and Luke Anderson at Americans United; Daniel Mach at the ACLU; Jessica Levin, Wendy Lecker, Patrick Cremin and Katrina Reichert at ELC; Samuel T. Grover and Kyle J. Steinberg at FFRF; and Brent L. Rowland and Morgan Bandy at Oklahoma Appleseed.



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