

The “Jesus Loves Me” Mask Case

Case Name: *Booth v. Simpson County School District*

Case Status: Complaint and motion for preliminary injunction filed at U.S. District Court for the Southern District of Mississippi on November 2, 2020.

Significance: Whether schools can suppress the religious speech and expression of students.



Background: Lydia Booth is a third-grade student at Simpson Central School and comes from a devout Christian family. Consistent with the school’s COVID-19 guidelines, Lydia has been wearing a face mask to school for the last several months, including occasionally wearing a mask with the phrase “Jesus Loves Me.” Many students have used their masks to express themselves, including wearing masks with sports team logos, university logos and the phrase “Black Lives Matter.” On October 13, Lydia was pulled aside by school administrators and forced to remove and replace her mask. Lydia’s mother, Jennifer, learned that her daughter was singled out and immediately researched the school’s policy, finding that it did not prohibit messages on masks. After Jennifer questioned these policies through social media and spoke with school officials, the school then *changed* the policy in an attempt to justify their discrimination against Lydia’s religious expression. Alliance Defending Freedom has filed a federal lawsuit against the school for violating Lydia’s First Amendment rights. Public schools cannot discriminate against students for their religious beliefs.

Key Points

- All students have the constitutional right to express their religious beliefs, without fear of being singled out and embarrassed by school officials.
- Students’ right to religious expression doesn’t disappear when they step into school.
- Public school officials have no right to discriminate against a nine-year old for her religious expression. To do so is a gross violation of the First Amendment.

Key Facts

- Lydia was pulled aside and singled out simply for expressing her religious views.
- The school intentionally changed its policy to discriminate against Lydia *after* her mother questioned the mask policy.
- Other students express their views on masks, including wearing masks with sports logos, university logos, and the phrase “Black Lives Matter” – but Lydia was singled out and punished for expressing her Christian faith.
- Christian students shouldn’t be censored at public schools just because district officials consider religious speech to be offensive.

The Bottom Line: This isn’t just about a mask – it’s about a public school picking and choosing which viewpoints are welcome in the classroom.