

Religious Freedom in Public Schools

Religious freedom in public schools is protected by federal and state law. Under the U.S. Constitution, Titles IV and VI of the Civil Rights Act (42 U.S.C. §§ 2000d, 2000e), and the Tennessee Religious Freedom Restoration Act (Tenn. Code Ann. § 4-1-407) **you have a right to:**

Be safe from religious harassment and discrimination in school.

Public school officials are required by law to maintain a school environment that is free of religious harassment by school officials and other students. In addition, public schools may not discriminate against students based on their faith backgrounds or religious beliefs. Whether your school has violated the law in this area will depend on the circumstances of your particular situation.

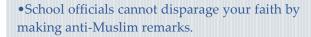


Students have broad rights to express their religious beliefs at school. You may, for example, pray individually or in groups and discuss your religious views with your peers during student activity times (like recess or lunch), provided you are not disruptive. You may express your religious beliefs in reports, homework, and artwork, where the beliefs are relevant to the assignment. And you may pass out religious literature to classmates, subject to the same rules that apply to other materials distributed by students. Further, if a school rule substantially burdens your religious exercise, your school must grant you an exemption unless the rule is the least restrictive means of achieving a compelling governmental interest.

Be free from school-sponsored prayer and proselytizing.

Students and families have the right to decide for themselves where and when to pray and which faith, if any, to follow—without direct or indirect pressure from school officials. Thus, school officials may not promote religion to students.

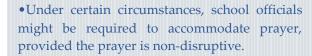
This means that:





- •School officials must take action to stop repeated religiously-based harassment by other students.
- •School officials cannot deny you the same privileges and opportunities provided to students of other faiths.

This means that:





- •School officials might be required to permit you to wear religious clothing or a religious head covering, such as a hijab, depending on the circumstances of your particular situation.
- •School officials must allow you to express your faith, form religious student clubs, and engage in other religious activities to the same extent that students of other faiths may do so.
- •School officials might be required to excuse your absences for religious holidays.

This means that:



- •School officials may not incorporate organized prayer into class or school events.
- •School officials may not evangelize students, teach religious doctrine as truth, or display religious symbols and messages for noneducational reasons.

If you believe your religious liberty rights have been violated, contact the ACLU of Tennessee online at http://www.aclu-tn.org/gethelp.htm or by phone at (615) 320-7142. Additional resources are on the back.

Additional Resources

More information on religious freedom can be found at http://www.aclu-tn.org/religiousfreedom.htm



Know Your Rights, A Guide for Public School Students in Tennessee (ACLU-TN students' rights handbook) can be found at http://www.aclu-tn.org/pdfs/SRHandbook2010.pdf



"Know Your Rights: Religion in Public Schools" can be found at http://www.aclu-tn.org/pdfs/briefer religion in public schools.pdf



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