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PRESS RELEASE

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SCHOOL OFFICIALS TELL SIXTH GRADER SHE MAY NOT USE JOHN 3:16 IN CLASS ASSIGNMENT

**Liberty Institute Sends Demand Letter to Somerset Academy to Protect Student's
Constitutional Right to Express Religious Beliefs**

NORTH LAS VEGAS, NV, May 20, 2015—Today, Liberty Institute sent a demand letter to Somerset Academy school officials on behalf of sixth-grader Mackenzie Fraiser. Recently, school officials denied Mackenzie the right to use Bible verses, including John 3:16, in a class writing assignment about her identity and self-esteem. Liberty Institute attorneys gave Somerset Academy school officials 10 days to issue a written apology to the Fraisers and allow 12-year-old Mackenzie to resubmit her assignment using a Bible verse. (Read demand letter: <http://libertyinstitute.org/fraiser>)

“Government officials telling little girls they can't mention God is not the law. It's unlawful religious discrimination, and it's morally wrong,” said Kelly Shackelford, Liberty Institute President and CEO.

Jeremy Dys, Liberty Institute Senior Counsel, said, “Students have a constitutional right to express their beliefs in class assignments. They should never be intimidated into feeling like their faith is bad or something they have to hide. Somerset Academy has denied Mackenzie's constitutional and civil rights, ignoring U.S. Department of Education guidelines. We ask them to apologize and reaffirm their students' rights to express their faith in school assignments.”

Case Background

In February 2015, Somerset Academy sixth-grader Mackenzie Fraiser's schoolteacher assigned her class a PowerPoint presentation called “All About Me.” In the presentation, Mackenzie was instructed to include a slide with an “inspirational saying” that was important to her identity. Though she planned to include her favorite Bible verse—John 3:16—Mackenzie's teacher emphatically told her and the other students they were not allowed to put “Bible verses or quotations from the Book of Mormon” on the “inspirational sayings” slide.

Later in May, a teacher gave Mackenzie a new assignment on self-esteem. When her stepmother suggested she include a Bible verse in the project, Mackenzie got nervous and informed her parents that one of her teachers had made it clear that using Bible verses in class assignments was wrong. Mackenzie's father, a pastor, emailed her teacher to ask why Mackenzie had been denied the right to include the Bible verse in her assignment. The Assistant Principal responded, incorrectly, that they were simply following U.S. Department of Education guidelines. However, as Liberty Institute attorneys pointed out, U.S. Department of

Education Guidelines explicitly permit students to use Bible verses in class assignments: “Students may express their beliefs about religion in homework, artwork, and other written and oral assignments free from discrimination based on the religious content of their submissions.” (Read the guidelines: http://www2.ed.gov/policy/gen/guid/religionandschools/prayer_guidance.html)

About Liberty Institute

Liberty Institute is the largest nonprofit legal organization in the nation dedicated solely to defending religious liberty in America. Liberty Institute protects freedom of religious expression in our military, schools, churches, and throughout the public arena. For more information, visit www.LibertyInstitute.org.