



(Watch a video of Toni's Story [here](#). Credit: FirstLiberty.org/Richardson)

**Victory for Special Education Employee Reprimanded for Telling Coworker, “I will pray for you”**  
*School district acknowledges First Amendment rights of its employees*

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**AUGUSTA, ME**—Today, the Augusta School Department sent First Liberty client Toni Richardson an updated memorandum acknowledging Richardson’s protected First Amendment right to privately discuss religion among her co-workers. In May, First Liberty and Maine-based law firm Eaton Peabody filed charges of religious discrimination and retaliation against the school district with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) on Richardson’s behalf.

Although school records show that Richardson has been an exemplary employee, last year the school district threatened her with disciplinary action or dismissal if she continued to privately discuss her faith with her coworkers in any manner at school, even among coworkers who attend the same church as Richardson.

“It is important for each of us to defend the religious liberty of every American,” Timothy Woodcock of the Maine law firm of Eaton Peabody and lead counsel for Toni Richardson, says. “Toni’s case should be a reminder to employers everywhere that you cannot discriminate against employees who privately discuss their faith at work.”

“The Supreme Court has been very clear on this: Neither students nor teachers lose their First Amendment rights at the schoolhouse gate,” said Jeremy Dys, Deputy General Counsel for First Liberty. “The Constitution protects teachers like Toni who do not and should not have to censor their religious beliefs in private conversations at work.”

The updated coaching memorandum withdraws any threats of disciplinary action against Richardson by the school district and acknowledges the First Amendment rights of all school employees, including Richardson, “to express religious beliefs or use faith-based language at school.” The memorandum continues:

Comments such as “God Bless You” or “I am praying for you” are permissible when made to co-workers outside of the hearing of students.

“I love my job helping special needs students succeed, and I am glad that I don’t have to sacrifice my First Amendment rights in order to be here,” Toni Richardson says. “I hope my colleagues, and school employees across the country, will remember that the First Amendment still protects our private conversations at work.”

To learn more, visit [FirstLiberty.org/Richardson](http://FirstLiberty.org/Richardson).

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### **About First Liberty Institute**

[First Liberty Institute](http://FirstLiberty.org) is a non-profit public interest law firm and the largest legal organization in the nation dedicated exclusively to defending religious freedom for all Americans.

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