



News Release
For Immediate Release: 12.11.19
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New York School District Breaking Federal Equal Access Law, says National Legal Organization

First Liberty Institute says school officials are illegally preventing student from forming student club at school because it is religious

Hopewell Junction, NY—Today, First Liberty Institute sent a [letter](#) to the Wappingers Central School District demanding that it immediately approve Ketcham High School freshman Daniela Barca’s request to form a religious club at the school. The school’s repeated denial of Daniela’s application to form a religious club, despite being presented with the law several times, is a purposeful violation of the Equal Access Act of 1984.

“Wappingers Central school officials engaged in purposeful, intentional religious discrimination against Daniela for months,” said Keisha Russell, Counsel to First Liberty Institute. “We hope this school district ends its clearly unlawful behavior and protects the religious liberty of every student in all its schools.”

Last summer, Daniela, 14, approached a teacher about wanting to start a Christian club at Roy C. Ketcham High School this school year. After school started, she worked to submit the required application for forming a student group. Weeks went by with no answer. Then, school officials lost her application. School officials still dragged their feet for several weeks after they found the application. Daniela’s principal eventually denied her request, suggesting that the school could not support a religious club like the other secular student clubs. When she and her father appealed to the assistant superintendent, he suggested that a club meeting “to gather and talk about spreading the hope of Jesus” could not be recognized as an official club unless it modified its viewpoint to something more “generic” and “couldn’t limit it to the Christian Faith.” Throughout the process, Daniela and her father presented several district officials with the Equal Access Act, but the officials ignored the law and still denied Daniela’s request.

Daniela is discouraged by the school’s discrimination and hopes for a quick resolution. She said, “Sometimes I feel like I’m the only Christian at my school and I thought others might feel the same way. So, I wanted to start a club at school so we can support each other in our beliefs. I hope the superintendent lets me start the club and does whatever it takes to make sure religious clubs are treated like all the other clubs.”

In its letter to school officials, First Liberty explains that the Equal Access Act prohibits schools from denying religious clubs’ access to school facilities when access is granted to secular clubs. The letter states, “As the U.S. Supreme Court explained, religious clubs must be afforded the same recognition, access and rights as other noncurricular clubs.”

You can read the demand letter, [here](#).

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About First Liberty Institute

[First Liberty Institute](#) is the largest legal organization in the nation dedicated exclusively to defending religious freedom for all Americans.

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