

## **Second Michigan School Seeks to Censor Religious Content in Student's High School Graduation Speech**

*John Glenn High School principal tells high school valedictorian to remove Christian faith from senior honors night address*

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**Westland, MI**— Today, First Liberty Institute sent a letter to the principal at John Glenn High School in Westland, Michigan demanding that he allow a graduating senior, Savannah Lefler, to speak about her faith in her senior honors night remarks. The principal told Savannah to rewrite her senior honors night speech to remove her Christian viewpoint, although discussion of other viewpoints were permitted.

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

“How many more graduations have to be ruined before school officials learn that the First Amendment guards student remarks at graduation?” said Stephanie Taub, Senior Counsel for First Liberty Institute. “The Constitution protects students from having their religious viewpoint cancelled during a graduation speech. We urge Wayne-Westland Community school officials to follow the law and allow student religious speech at graduation related events.”

As the Class Scholar for 2021, Ms. Lefler was selected to give a short speech during her school's Senior Honors Night. In her speech, she encourages graduates to live a life of purpose, explaining that she believes the purpose of life is “to live a life devoted to Christ.” After reviewing a draft of Savannah's speech, Principal Michael Wegher sent an email stating that, “Unfortunately, we are a public educational institution and must legally abide by the 1st Amendment of the US Constitution. Through past Supreme Court cases, rulings have stated that government institutions, including public schools, cannot favor one religion over any others. This would include honors speeches since it would be an official communication from the school.” In a phone call with Savannah, he said the speech was too “Christianized.”

In its letter to school officials, First Liberty says, “Contrary to your assertion, Ms. Lefler's statements do not transform into government speech simply because they are delivered in a public school setting or channel. Censoring private speech because of its religious viewpoint violates the First Amendment. As the Class Scholar, Ms. Lefler was selected based on neutral-criteria, and she was instructed to speak from her experiences using her words. It is unconstitutional viewpoint discrimination to permit student graduation speeches that discuss various philosophies or worldviews but prohibit a speech that focuses on the student's own worldview because it is religious.”

First Liberty has a meeting scheduled with school officials on Wednesday.

First Liberty recently represented another Michigan graduate, Elizabeth Turner, when her Hillsdale, Michigan principal censored her speech. In that case, school officials reversed their position after receiving a letter from and meeting with First Liberty.

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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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