

No. 22-2927

In the United States Court of Appeals for the Eighth Circuit

PARENTS DEFENDING EDUCATION,
Plaintiff-Appellant,

v.

LINN-MAR COMMUNITY SCHOOL DISTRICT, *et al.*,
Defendants-Appellees.

On Appeal from the United States District Court
for the Northern District of Iowa
Case No. 1:22-cv-00078

**BRIEF *AMICUS CURIAE* OF THE FOUNDATION FOR MORAL
LAW IN SUPPORT OF PLAINTIFF/APPELLANT AND REVERSAL**

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CORPORATE DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

Amici make the following disclosures under Fed. R. App. P. R. 26.1 and 8th Cir. R. 26.1A:

1. Is any *Amicus* a subsidiary or affiliate of a publicly owned corporation?

No. Each *Amicus* is a natural person, and as such has no parent company and has not issued stock.

2. Is there a public corporation, not a party to the appeal or an *Amicus*, that has a financial interest in the outcome?

None known.

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INTEREST OF *AMICUS CURIAE*¹

Amicus Curiae Foundation for Moral Law (“the Foundation”), is a national public-interest organization based in Montgomery, Alabama, dedicated to the defense of religious liberty and the strict interpretation of the Constitution as written and intended by its Framers.

The Foundation has an interest in this case because it believes that the challenged legislation places an unconstitutional burden on the speech of students and teachers who believe, sometimes because of religious conviction, that sex is assigned at conception or birth and cannot be changed by a personal decision or even by hormones or surgery. Although none of the petitioners in this case are teachers in the Linn-Mar School District, this Court should take cognizance of the rights of teachers to freedom of expression. The wife of the primary author of this brief, Foundation Senior Counsel John Eidsmoe, was herself a teacher in the Linn-Mar School District before their marriage in 1970.

¹ Pursuant to Fed. R. App. P. 37.2, counsel of record for all parties received notice of intent to file this brief at least ten days before the due date. Pursuant to Rule 37.3, all parties have consented to the filing of this brief. Pursuant to Rule 37.6, no party or party’s counsel authored this brief in whole or in part, or contributed money that was intended to fund its preparation or submission; and no person other than the *amicus curiae*, its members, or its counsel, contributed money that was intended to fund the preparation or submission of this brief.

SUMMARY OF ARGUMENT

Because compulsory speech contrary to a person's beliefs is more offensive than enforced silence, compelled speech is an even more egregious First Amendment violation than prohibited speech. Furthermore, gender identification is a highly-charged medical, scientific, sociological, political, and religious issue. Speech related to gender therefore deserves the highest legal protection.

Because freedom of speech is expressly protected by the First Amendment while the right to choose one's gender is at most an extra-constitutional court-created right which the Supreme Court has not yet recognized, any conflict between those rights should be resolved in favor of the enumerated right of freedom of speech.

Finally, questions as to one's sex or gender have very important lifelong ramifications for the person and for others. If children are to make decisions on this subject, they should make them in conjunction with their parents. A school policy that excludes parents from this decision or knowledge of the decision therefore violates parents' constitutional rights.

ARGUMENT

Suppose, for a moment, that you are a vehement opponent of President Donald Trump. You intensely dislike him personally, you find his style of leadership abhorrent, you consider his “tweets” repulsive, you consider his policies immoral and destructive, and you fervently hope he is not reelected. And you take it for granted that your right to express your opinion about him is protected by the First Amendment.

Suppose, then, that a law is enacted that prohibits you from saying or writing anything critical of President Trump, his style, or his policies, under severe legal penalties for violating this law. You would feel outraged, and rightly so, because your right of freedom of expression has been violated. But you might decide to grit your teeth and remain silent rather than face the penalties.

But suppose, instead, that the law is changed, and now requires you not just to remain silent but to affirmatively say: “I love President Trump, I admire his style, I love his tweets, I hope his policies are enacted, and, above all, I fervently hope he is reelected in 2024.” You would then be doubly outraged. You might think: “I might begrudgingly keep my mouth shut about President Trump, but there’s no way I’m going to speak his praises. I’ll go to jail instead.”

The point is this: Compelled speech is an even more egregious First Amendment violation than suppressed speech. And a requirement that students and teachers address people by their “preferred” names and pronouns is clearly compelled speech.

I. Compelled speech is an especially egregious violation of the First Amendment.

Compelled speech is an even more egregious First Amendment violation than prohibited speech. Forcing someone to say what one does not believe is worse than forcing a person to remain silent, just as forcing someone to contribute to President Trump’s campaign is more outrageous than prohibiting donations to his opponent.

The Supreme Court has recognized that compelled speech is a First Amendment violation ever since *West Virginia State Board of Education v. Barnette*, 319 U.S. 624 (1943), in which the Court held that public schools could not force students to say the Pledge of Allegiance if they or their parents objected. Justice Jackson stated for the Court at 634, “To sustain the compulsory flag salute we are required to say that a Bill of Rights which

guards the individual's right to speak his own mind, left it open to public authorities to compel him to utter what is not in his mind.”²

In *Miami Herald Publishing Co. v. Tornillo*, 418 U.S. 241 (1974), the Court held unconstitutional a Florida statute requiring newspapers to publish replies of political candidates whom they had criticized, again invoking the compelled-speech doctrine.

Likewise, in *Wooley v. Maynard*, 430 U.S. 705 (1977), the Court held that New Hampshire could not compel Maynard to display the state motto “Live Free or Die” on his vehicle license plate. Chief Justice Burger held for the majority at page 713:

We are thus faced with the question of whether the State may constitutionally require an individual to participate in the dissemination of an ideological message by displaying it on his private property in a manner and for the express purpose that it be observed and read by the public. We hold that the State may not do so.

On January 5, 2018, the Fourth Circuit held that a Baltimore ordinance requiring pregnancy clinics that do not offer or refer for abortion

² Although Barnette and other plaintiffs objected to the Pledge for religious reasons, the Court stated at 634, “[n]or does the issue as we see it turn on one's possession of particular religious views or the sincerity with which they are held. While religion supplies appellees' motive for enduring the discomforts of making the issue in this case, many citizens who do not share these religious views hold such a compulsory rite to infringe constitutional liberty of the individual.”

to disclose that fact through signs posted in their waiting rooms violated the First Amendment. *Greater Baltimore Ctr. for Pregnancy Concerns, Inc. v. Mayor and City Council of Baltimore*, No. 16-2325 (4th Cir. 2018).

The Fourth Circuit concluded that the Baltimore ordinance constitutes compelled speech because it “compel[s] a politically and religiously motivated group to convey a message fundamentally at odds with its core beliefs and mission.” *Id.* at 5. The Court noted further that an integral component of freedom of expression is “the right not to utter political and philosophical beliefs that the state wishes to have said.” *Id.* at 16 (citing *West Va. State Bd. of Educ. v. Barnette*, 319 U.S. at 642).

This Court has in the past struck down attempts to compel speech from abortion providers. *Stuart v. Camnitz*, 114 F.3d 238, 242 (4th Cir. 2014). And today we do the same with regard to compelling speech from abortion foes. We do so in belief that earnest advocates on all sides of this issue should not be forced by the state into a corner and required essentially to renounce and forswear what they have come as a matter of deepest conviction to believe.

Greater Baltimore, No. 16-2325 at 20.

The Fourth Circuit concluded:

Weaponizing the means of government against ideological foes risks a grave violation of our nation’s dearest principles: “that no official, high or petty, can prescribe what shall be orthodox in politics, nationalism, religion, or other matters of opinion or force citizens to confess by word or act their faith therein.” *Barnette*, 319 U.S. at 642. It may be too much to hope that despite their disagreement, pro-choice and pro-life advocates

can respect each other's dedication and principle. But, at least in this case, as in *Stuart*, it is not too much to ask that they lay down the arms of compelled speech and wield only the tools of persuasion. The First Amendment requires it.

Id. at 20-21.

On June 26, 2018, the Supreme Court decided *National Institute of Family and Life Advocates v. Becerra*, 138 S. Ct. 1275 (2018). The California Reproductive Freedom, Accountability, Comprehensive Care, and Transparency Act (FACT Act) required crisis pregnancy centers to post notices informing their patients that California provides free or low-cost pregnancy services, including abortion and providing information as to how those services could be obtained. NIFLA objected, because telling people how and where they can obtain abortions runs contrary to their belief that abortion is wrong. The Court sided with NIFLA, holding that the required notice was compelled speech that violated the First Amendment.

The policy enacted by the Linn-Mar School District is compelled speech of the most egregious nature. It requires students and teachers to address students by their "preferred pronouns" and chosen names, even though those pronouns and names may differ from the student's gender as determined at birth or conception or as stated on the student's birth certificate or other official documents. Refusing to use these politically correct names and pronouns can result in discipline for "*intentionally or*

accidentally using the incorrect name or pronouns to refer to another person.” Linn-Mar Cmty. Sch. Dist. Policy 504.13-R (emphasis added). Because Linn-Mar’s policy applies primarily to student speech, attempts by respondents in *NIFLA* and *Greater Baltimore* to downgrade the level of constitutional protection to “business speech,” “commercial speech,” or “professional speech” obviously do not apply to this case.

A student’s or teacher’s reasons for not using the politically correct name or pronouns could be many and varied. It could be accidental. Or, it could be because the “offending” student or teacher sincerely does not believe the other person’s gender has changed. The student or teacher may believe one’s gender is determined at conception by one’s DNA and cannot be changed by a personal choice or even by hormone therapy or surgery. If a student believes this, he is (from his perspective) lying if he calls or addresses someone by a name or pronoun that is different from that assigned at birth or conception. If he believes, as many do, that gender is determined by God, he may believe he is sinning against God if he calls someone by a different gender from that which God has assigned to that person. To compel him to use terminology he does not want to use is to compel him to lie and/or to sin.

II. The Linn-Mar policy discriminates on the basis of both content and viewpoint.

The Fourth Circuit's *Greater Baltimore* decision recognized that the signs required by the Baltimore ordinance were content-based and viewpoint-based.

The compelled speech at issue here raises particularly troubling First Amendment concerns. At bottom, the disclaimer portrays abortion as one among a menu of morally equivalent choices. While that may be the City's view, it is not the Center's. The message conveyed is antithetical to the very moral, religious, and ideological reasons the Center exists. Its avowed mission is to "provid[e] alternatives to abortion." . . . Its "pro-life Christian beliefs permeate all that the Center does."

Greater Baltimore, No. 16-2325 at 14-15.

The Fourth Circuit further stated:

Particularly troubling in this regard is (1) that the ordinance applies solely to speakers who talk about pregnancy-related services but not to speakers on any other topic; and (2) that the ordinance compels speech from pro-life pregnancy centers, but not other pregnancy clinics that offer or refer for abortion.

Id. at 17-18. The Court drove home its point: "A speech edict aimed directly at those pregnancy clinics that do not provide or refer for abortions *is neither viewpoint nor content neutral.*" *Id.* at 18 (emphasis added).

The Linn-Mar policy is likewise both content and viewpoint based. It is content based because it directly applies to a certain type of speech and to a specific issue: the gender of students who consider themselves to be of a different gender from that assigned at birth or conception. It is viewpoint

based because it requires speech that takes a specific viewpoint about transgenderism and forbids speech that takes a different viewpoint about transgenderism. The District Court said the policy is facially neutral because it prohibits “misgendering” transgender and cis-gender students alike, but it clearly discriminates in favor of one viewpoint and against another. Suppose a biologically male student claims to have transgendered into female and changes his name from John to JoAnn. One who believes transgenderism is legitimate is free to address that student as JoAnn and use female pronouns. But another who believes transgenderism is unscientific or immoral will be punished if he addresses the student as John and uses male pronouns.

Likewise, the District Court’s ruling that Policy 504.13-R does not unconstitutionally compel speech because students remain free to be silent and not address their fellow students at all, is contrary to clear rulings of the Supreme Court that a free speech violation exists if it has a “chilling effect” on speech. *See Dumbrowski v. Pfister*, 380 U.S. 479 (1965). If the Policy forces Student A to choose between either (1) saying what he believes, that is, addressing Student B by the pronoun he believes to be correct, or (2) keeping silent, the Policy clearly has a chilling effect on the Student A’s freedom of speech.

As we have seen above, the law disfavors content discrimination and strongly disfavors viewpoint discrimination.

This bias violates the neutrality required of government in the marketplace of ideas. As Justice Jackson said in *Barnette* at 641-42:

If there is any fixed star in our constitutional constellation, it is that no official, high or petty, can prescribe shall be orthodox in politics, nationalism, religion, or other matters of opinion or force citizens to confess by word or act their faith therein. If there are any circumstances which permit an exception, they do not now occur to us.

But that is precisely what Linn-Mar has done. By enacting this policy, Linn-Mar has prescribed what shall be orthodox in matters of transgenderism: Recognition and acceptance of transgenderism is orthodox, and all must say so, while the traditional view of gender is now unorthodox, and none may breathe a word of dissent.

Government may have some limited flexibility to advance ideas and policies by what is called “government speech,”³ but it may not advance those policies by prohibiting private speech, much less by compelling individuals to speak in support of the government’s position. For example,

³ In light of the Supreme Court's recent decision in *Kennedy v. Bremerton School District*, 142 S. Ct. 1612 (2022), in which Coach Kennedy's prayers at the 50-yard line after football games were held not to constitute government speech, there is no possibility that students’ use of names and gender pronouns could be considered government speech.

the State of New Hampshire may adopt “Live Free or Die” as its motto and place that motto on license plates, but the State may not compel individuals to display that motto. *Wooley v. Maynard*, 430 U.S. 705 (1977) (holding that New Hampshire may not prohibit Maynard, a Jehovah’s Witness, from covering the motto). As the Court said at 717, “where the State’s interest is to disseminate an ideology, no matter how acceptable to some, such interest cannot outweigh an individual’s First Amendment right to avoid becoming the courier for the State’s ideological message.” By enacting such a one-sided policy, Linn-Mar has demonstrated a clear animus against those who hold a more traditional view of gender identity.

III. The enumerated right of freedom of speech should take priority over the unenumerated right to be identified by preferred gender pronouns.

As the Supreme Court said in *Tinker v. Des Moines Independent Community School District*, 383 U.S. 503, 506 (1969), neither students nor teachers “shed their constitutional rights to freedom of speech or expression at the schoolhouse gate.” Further, “[t]he vigilant protection of constitutional freedoms is nowhere more vital than in the community of American schools,” *Shelton v. Tucker*, 364 U.S. 479, 487 (1960). Freedom of speech is therefore a highly-protected right, especially in an academic setting.

By contrast, the right to change one’s gender identification, and *a fortiori* the right to force others to address one by those preferred names and pronouns, is not found anywhere in the Constitution and is, at most, a “right” some have tried to read into the “emanations” and “penumbras” of the Constitution. Even *Lawrence v. Texas*, 539 U.S. 558 (2003) (recognizing a right to engage in homosexual acts) and *Obergefell v. Hodges*, 576 U.S. 644 (2015) (recognizing a right to same-sex marriage) did not recognize transgenderism. After the uncertain conclusion of *Karnoski v. Trump*, 2017 WL 6311305; 926 F.3d 1180; 139 S. Ct. 950 (2019), the Foundation believes there is no constitutional right to change one’s gender identification or to require others to recognize one’s gender preference.

The right to change one’s gender identification is far different from the right to engage in homosexual acts or to enter into a same-sex marriage. The right to change one’s gender identification is actually a right to re-define reality. It is, as in Lewis Carroll’s conversation between Alice and the Queen in *Through the Looking Glass*, the power to believe impossible things:

Alice laughed. “There’s no use trying,” she said: “one can’t believe impossible things.” “I daresay you haven’t had much practice,” said the Queen. “When I was your age, I always did it

for half-an-hour a day. Why, sometimes I've believed as many as six impossible things before breakfast.”⁴

The relative weight of the alleged right to change one's gender identification and to be addressed by the gender one prefers must be measured against the First Amendment right of freedom of speech.

The First Amendment expressly states that “Congress shall make no law . . . abridging the freedom of speech.” And “expression on public issues ‘has always rested on the highest rung of the hierarchy of First Amendment values.’” *NAACP v. Claiborne Hardware Co.*, 458 U.S. 886, 913 (1982) (quoting *Carey v. Brown*, 447 U.S. 455, 467 (1980)).

Thus, the First Amendment inherently carries more weight than the conjured right to change one's gender identification. “It is one thing for the Court . . . to invalidate legislation found to be in clear violation of an explicit constitutional command; it is quite another for the Court to claim the authority to invalidate legislation based on rights not mentioned in the Constitution.” Smolin, David, *Fourteenth Amendment Unenumerated Rights Jurisprudence: An Essay in Response to Stenberg v. Carhart*, 24 Harv. J. L. & Pub. Pol’y 815, 817 (2001).

⁴ Carroll, Lewis, *Through the Looking Glass* (MacMillan 1871). One might even say those who identify with the opposite gender despite clear DNA evidence are “science deniers.”

When this new alleged right to transgenderism is weighed against the historic and clearly enumerated right to free speech, unquestionably, the right to free speech takes precedence. As the Court said in *Wooley*, 430 U.S. at 715, “[t]he First Amendment protects the right of individuals to hold a point of view different from the majority and to refuse to foster . . . an idea they find morally objectionable.” That applies to students and teachers who find transgenderism morally or scientifically objectionable, be they a minority or a majority.

IV. The Linn-Mar policy violates the right of parents to make decisions concerning the lives of their children.

In a series of decisions, the Supreme Court has recognized that parents have a fundamental right to make decisions concerning the raising and education of their children. *Meyer v. Nebraska*, 262 U.S. 390 (1923); *Pierce v. Society of Sisters*, 268 U.S. 510 (1925); *Farrington v. Tokushige*, 273 U.S. 284 (1927); *Wisconsin v. Yoder*, 406 U.S. 205 (1972); *Parham v. J.R.*, 442 U.S. 584 (1979); *Troxel v. Granville*, 530 U.S. 57 (2000). In *Pierce*, the Court stated at 535:

The fundamental theory of liberty upon which all governments in this Union repose excludes any general power of the state to standardize its children by forcing them to accept instruction from public teachers only. The child is not the mere creature of the state; those who nurture him and direct his destiny have the right, coupled with the high duty, to recognize and prepare him for additional obligations.

These cases limit the power of the state to intrude upon parental rights in a variety of ways: prohibiting parents from having their children instructed in any other language except English (*Meyer*); forcing parents to send their children to public schools (*Pierce*); requiring private schools to be substantially the same as public schools (*Farrington, Yoder*); disregarding the authority of parents in committing their children to mental hospitals (*Parham*); requiring parents to allow visitation with grandparents (*Troxel*).

But Linn-Mar's intrusion upon the rights of parents goes far beyond anything contemplated in the above cases. Not only does Linn-Mar allow students to identify with a different gender from that of their birth and change their names to reflect that chosen gender. Linn-Mar Policy 504.13-R requires all employees and students to address the child by his chosen name and pronoun; changes the child's name on government documents including identification cards, yearbooks, and diplomas; allows the child to use the restrooms, locker rooms, and changing rooms of the child's chosen gender, and participate in the physical education programs of the child's chosen gender, regardless of whether other students or their parents object. The policy authorizes school officials to create a "Gender Support Plan" for

students of all ages and specifies that “any student in the seventh grade or older will have priority of their support plan over their parent/guardian.

This means not only that school officials will recognize the child’s chosen gender and act accordingly, even if the parents do not agree with the child’s choice and even if the parents object to this gender transition. It goes even further than that. It requires school officials to conceal this gender transition from the child’s parents if the child so requests, at least until the Gender Support Plan is finalized.

Few decisions, if any, are more life-altering than a decision to change one’s gender identification. Not only will this permanently change the child’s life in very substantial ways; it will alter the family as well. As parents discover that they no longer have a daughter but rather a “son” instead, as siblings discover that they no longer have a sister but rather a “brother” instead, the entire family dynamic is dramatically and drastically changed. That the Linn-Mar School District would change children and families so drastically without parental consent, and for children in seventh grade or above (age 11 or 12) without even parental knowledge, is an egregious violation of parental rights as identified by the Supreme Court.

V. Petitioners have standing to bring this action.

Because the Linn-Mar policy will cause permanent damage to families and to the lives of children, Petitioners should not have to wait until such damage has occurred in order to have standing to challenge this policy. The fact that the policy has been adopted, is in effect, and is clear about what the school officials are required to do, is sufficient to establish standing. Furthermore, parents and student should not have to wait until a student is actually disciplined for violating the policy. Again, the policy is clear. It states that “[a]n intentional and/or persistent refusal by staff or students to respect a student’s gender identity is a violation of school board policies 103.1 Anti-Bullying and Anti-Harassment, 104.1 Equal Educational Opportunity, and 104.3 Prohibition of Discrimination and/or Harassment based on Sex Per Title IX.” Policy 103.1 provides:

Any student found to have violated or retaliated in violation of this policy shall be subject to measures up to, and including, suspension and expulsion. Any school employee found to have violated or retaliated in violation of this policy shall be subject to measures up to, and including, termination of employment. Any school volunteer found to have violated or retaliated in violation of this policy shall be subject to measures up to, and including, removal from service and exclusion from school grounds.

Knowing what is going to happen, the courts need not wait for it to actually happen in order to recognize that Petitioners have standing to challenge this action.

Also, many of the parents who are affiliated with the Petitioner Parents Defending Education have publicly spoken against Policy 504.13-R. At the School Board meeting of April 25, 2022, seventy-six persons spoke about the policy with many of them, if not most, in opposition.⁵ School Board members and school officials know who these persons are, and who their children are, so their children have a heightened likelihood of being watched and disciplined.

Furthermore, even if no student has yet been punished for violating 504.13-R, the threat of punishment has undoubtedly had a chilling effect on students' and teachers' freedom of expression. Undoubtedly, many students have either violated their own beliefs and addressed transgender students by their preferred names or pronouns, or have remained silent and not addressed them at all. Their free speech rights have therefore been violated,

⁵ Breese, Travis, "Linn-Mar School Board Approves Policy Affirming Rights for Transgender Students," KWWL.COM (April 25, 2022) available at https://www.kwwl.com/news/cedar-rapids/linn-mar-school-board-approves-policy-affirming-rights-for-transgender-students/article_a43b10cc-c517-11ec-874a-bb52145ed7f6.html.

and “every violation [of a right] imports damage,” *Uzuegbunum v. Preczewski*, 141 S. Ct. 792, 802 (2021).

Because their constitutional rights have already been violated, Petitioners have standing to challenge this policy.

CONCLUSION

Transgenderism is a relatively new subject, at least in the public arena, and there is much to be learned. Dr. James Cantor reports that, according to a consensus of ten scientific studies, “[t]he exact number varies by study, but roughly 60-90% of trans-kids turn out no longer to be trans by adulthood.”⁶ One can only imagine how much damage can be done to children and to their families by facilitating or encouraging children to identify with the opposite gender. For example, a child who identifies with the opposite sex may decide to take puberty blockers or undergo surgery, only to change his/her mind later. The physical, mental, social, emotional, and/or psychological damage to children and their families may be severe and irreparable.

⁶ Cantor, Dr. James, “Do Trans Kids Stay Trans When They Grow Up?” *Sexology Today* (Jan. 11 2016) available at http://www.sexologytoday.org/2016/01/do-trans-kids-stay-trans-when-they-grow_99.html. See also, “Do Children Grow Out of Gender Dysphoria?” *Transgender Trend*, available at <https://www.transgendertrend.com/children-change-minds/>

It is tempting to leave this matter to the political process. However, the constitutional rights of parents and children are at stake. A basic purpose of a bill of rights is to place certain matters above and outside the political process.

Linn-Mar Community School District Policy 504.13 violates the free speech rights of students and teachers and violates the right of parents to control the upbringing of their children.

This Court should reverse the decision of the District Court.

Respectfully submitted,

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