

ON ANNIVERSARY OF LANDMARK FREE SPEECH RULING, ACLU-WV PUTS SCHOOLS ON NOTICE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: June 14, 2024

CONTACT: Billy Wolfe bwolfe@acluwv.org

CHARLESTON, W.Va. – Eighty-one years to the day since the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that schools cannot compel students to recite the Pledge of Allegiance, ACLU-WV has put education officials on notice that they are violating the ruling.

During the height of nationalism that swept the country during WWII, the American Civil Liberties Union brought a lawsuit against the Kanawha County Board of Education for expelling two sisters who refused to recite the Pledge in accordance with their Jehovah’s Witness faith. The expulsions exposed the children to delinquency hearings and their parents to criminal prosecution.

A review of the website of every West Virginia public high school found that **(((number)))** of schools have student handbooks stating that students are required to remove their hats, stand, and recite the Pledge. To mark the July 14, 1942 ruling, ACLU-WV has sent a letter to school officials to educate them about compliance.

“Not only has this question been settled, it was settled right here in Kanawha County eight decades ago,” ACLU-WV Legal Director Aubrey Sparks said. “Any school that is requiring students to recite the Pledge is doing so in direct violation of 81 years of legal precedent.”

The letter, prepared by ACLU-WV legal fellows Patrick Hassen (West Virginia University College of Law) and London Henderson (American University Washington College of Law) was sent to (((name the schools in violation here))) administrators and school board members in (((counties where the violative policies are in place))). Sparks said all West Virginia public schools should re-examine student policies to make sure they are complying with the ruling.

“QUOTE THE LETTER HERE.”

Sparks added that many schools have “outstanding” policies regarding students’ free speech rights, and that the vast majority of schools were found to be in compliance.

Any public school student that is forced to recite the Pledge against their beliefs is encouraged to contact the ACLU-WV legal team at <https://www.acluwv.org/en/legal-assistance> or by calling **304-(((NUMBER)))**

--30--