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Colorado school accused of preventing student from decorating personal parking space with Bible verse

First Liberty Institute demands district reverse alleged denial of student's religious expression



By **Gabriel Hays** · Fox News

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A high school senior alleged this week that her [Colorado Springs](#) high school violated the First Amendment by barring her from decorating a personalized parking space with Christian messages.

On behalf of senior Sophia Shumaker, the [legal group First Liberty Institute](#) filed a complaint with Rampart High School and Academy School District 20, accusing the school of viewpoint discrimination for denying her request to include a reference to Scripture on her parking space.

"Academy School District 20 created a public forum, whether designated or limited, when it opened its parking lots as a space where seniors may engage in private speech during their senior year," the complaint stated. "What students paint on their parking spaces in the district is, therefore, protected by the Free Speech Clause and Rampart High School may not restrict Ms. Shumaker's speech based on its religious viewpoint."

WISCONSIN SKI PARK FACES LAWSUIT AFTER ALLEGEDLY FIRING EMPLOYEE FOR SHARING BIBLE VERSES ON SOCIAL MEDIA



A Colorado Springs high school senior filed a legal complaint against her school for allegedly not letting her decorate her personalized school parking space with Christian references. (Mario Tama/Getty)

As the [complaint noted](#), Rampart High School allows seniors to decorate their own personalized parking spaces for the year. However, it places certain restrictions on what can be included in the designs.

Quoting the policy, the letter stated, "The guidelines prohibit messages that the district deems, 'offensive, negative, rude, gang-related, political, religious, or trademarked images.' The school's guidelines also state that if a student's first design is 'deemed unacceptable' by the school, the student only has 'one chance to change [the] design or forfeit [her] spot.'"

The letter claimed that in August, Shumaker "requested to paint her space with a shepherd on a hill, a staff and a sheep, along with a [Bible verse](#)." However, one of the teachers overseeing the parking lot initiative denied the request, citing school policy.

Shumaker attempted to amend her design, asking if she could instead add "1 Cor 13:4" to a new design that "was otherwise not religious." The teacher allegedly discouraged her, saying over text, "Yeah, no abbreviated verse. Not sure if it would get approved. Let me ask."

COURT APPROVES SETTLEMENT AFTER NORTH CAROLINA STUDENT SUSPENDED FOR 'ILLEGAL ALIENS' COMMENT



First Liberty is objecting to a Colorado Springs high school allegedly preventing students from putting religious messages on personalized parking spaces. (Johannes Simon/Getty Images)

First Liberty argued that the school's policy is inconsistent with the district's broader rules on religious messages, noting that other schools in Academy School District 20 allow them on parking spaces. The complaint said this inconsistency shows that such messages "are private speech, not government speech."

"Therefore, the district cannot deny Ms. Shumaker's private, [religious speech](#) without violating the First Amendment," the complaint added.

The legal group continued its analysis, saying that the "First Amendment's protections extend to students" — in this case, Shumaker and her right to freely exercise her religion — particularly since the district provided a public forum for students to engage in speech by allowing the parking spots.

The letter concluded by demanding that the district reverse Rampart's denial of Shumaker's religious expression on her parking space and strike its "unconstitutional policy."

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A Bible on a desk. (plherrera/Getty)

When reached for comment by Fox News Digital, the District said, "Academy District 20 is aware of an attorney letter regarding a Rampart High School student parking spot design. We do not comment on potential legal matters or individual student situations but confirm that we are reviewing the information provided."

The statement continued: "Although Academy District 20 was not contacted by a family or student about this concern and did not receive the attorney's letter prior to Oct. 22, we can share that Rampart High School's senior parking-spot program is a school-sponsored activity with content guidelines and a staff approval process."

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Gabriel Hays is an associate editor for Fox News Digital.

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DemsKeepGettingDumber

7 minutes ago

Problem is, the school cannot prevent religious posting....it would violate the student's rights which do not stop at the school house door (or in this case, the parking space.) The litmus test:

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