



Pastor Sean Wegener, Senior Pastor
Pastor Josh Sowards, Christian Ed. and Children
Pastor Josh Allen, Youth Ministry

231 West Philadelphia Avenue · P.O. Box 457 · Bridgeport, West Virginia 26330 · Phone (304) 842-3589
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Harrison County School Board,

Thank you for your willingness to serve our community in your duly elected position. We understand that administrative duties are difficult at this present time. The volatility and rapidly changing nature of our own culture compounds the administrative work of the school board. Therefore, while what follows is our duty as civically responsible voters, we offer it with a due measure of respect and grace for your respective offices.

On April 30, 2024, the Senate President-Lieutenant Governor, Craig P. Blair, issued a statement with regard to the “punitive action against five student-athletes who chose to exercise their right to ‘step out’ of their recent track and field event to protest unfair competition.” Blair stated, “The rules that govern the West Virginia Secondary Schools Activities Commission specifically outline the procedure for addressing a team or student who leaves a playing field in protest, including the consequences of those protest actions.” Furthermore, he continued, “By refusing to adhere to these standards, Harrison County Schools is showing a galling lack of concern for the free-speech considerations of those students.”

As a religious institution in Harrison County, Simpson Creek Baptist Church is concerned for those students whose free speech has been violated. Simpson Creek Baptist Church was founded in 1770. In 1774 Baptists brought a lawsuit against the Continental Congress. Represented by Isaac Backus, Baptists refused to participate in the formation of a new nation if certain liberties were not secured. One such liberty was the right to free speech. As a consequence of this lawsuit, Baptists were assured that if they would fight for and participate in the formation of the United States, this freedom would be secured.

Historically Baptists consider it an act of tyranny, when “a galling lack of concern” is made for the right to exercise a free conscience. Simpson Creek Baptist Church knows from its own historical context that when redress from an authority violates the free exercise of an individual's conscience, those who are not in the position of authority will suffer unduly under

the law. Echoing the words of James Madison regarding a violation of this first freedom in 1785, “This smell[s] of antiquated bigotry.”

As adults and Christ followers, we expect our students to show respect for authority. We teach our student-athletes to be willing to submit to those in authority over them, knowing that their authority figures ought to have the best interest of the students in mind. When it becomes evident that Harrison County Schools no longer respects the constitutional right to a free conscience, reinforced by the policies of West Virginia, and hard-won by Baptists like those in Harrison County, we cannot demand our students submit to the punitive measures of those authorities. Likewise, the citizens of Harrison County ought to hold accountable those who have violated these students’ rights.

Therefore, we ask that those who are involved in this violation would be reprimanded, and that greater consideration should be given to the protest of these students. The protest of these five student-athletes entails the right to a free competition among female students. We objectively recognize the fact that these five student-athletes lost the opportunity to compete free from inequality. Furthermore, one of our own church members lost the opportunity to compete free from the discomfort caused by sharing a dressing room with a biological male.

Please allow us to speak about both issues directly. First, regarding the lost opportunity to compete free from inequality. In accordance with Scripture and natural law (as cultures until now have typically recognized), Simpson Creek Baptist Church believes in the male and female distinction. Our church covenants dating back to the 1830s clearly teach this doctrine as well. Since it is our deeply held belief that God created only two genders, as an application thereof we believe that women involved in sports in Harrison County Schools ought to have the ability to compete according to their gender and age. Therefore, when five of our students are not afforded the free and equal treatment that is due to them by their rights under God, our church believes it is our duty to protect and advocate for the rights of these student-athletes. We would like to know if the Harrison County School Board feels the same responsibility, even if it does not share our religious convictions.

Second, regarding the discomfort caused by sharing a dressing room with a biologically male student-athlete. It has come to our attention that the middle school girls' track team has been facing undue discomfort in the form of verbal harassment and sexual advances from a biologically male student-athlete. Namely, that this student has said to one of the members of Simpson Creek Baptist Church in anatomically specific and atrociously pornographic vulgarism that this student intends to penetrate and sodomize our student, stating an intention to rape her ([a](#)

[link to the specific language is available here](#)). Yet, when concerns were brought concerning the discomfort caused by sharing a dressing room with a biologically male student-athlete, the student-athletes, and their parents were told that their daughters ought to find somewhere else to change. If this were done to create a safe place for the biologically male student-athlete, given the student's stated intent, can we say that one of the benefits of the middle school track program, namely a safe space to dress, is being afforded to our middle school student-athletes fairly and equally?

Charles Octavius Boothe, a freed slave and Baptist pastor, wrote “[Justice] means equal laws in righteous execution for the government of God’s intelligent creatures.” As such, he argued that a just law is only just if it is justly applied. He asks, “Can wisdom give birth to unrighteous laws and unequal administrations?” We pose this question to the Harrison County School Board. Should safe space be afforded to some, while the violation of this provision is forced upon others?

Therefore, we believe that the protest of the five student-athletes is justified, the punitive measures taken against them are morally reprehensible, showing a galling lack of concern for our daughters, and that the violation of our girls’ safe space in the locker room requires attention. We would ask that the Harrison County School Board review any policies which led to punitive measures and see that these policies change. Furthermore, we encourage the Harrison County School Board to give us its recommended course of action to protect our girls from the discomfort caused by sharing a locker room with a biologically male student-athlete, by the next scheduled meeting, May 7, 2024.

Montani Semper Liberi,
Simpson Creek Baptist Church
Dr. Sean Matthew Wegener, Senior Pastor
Joshua Allen, Pastor for Youth
Joshua Sowards, Pastor of Christian Education and Children