

## Plaintiff and Organizational Quotes

### ***OKPLAC, Inc. v. Statewide Virtual Charter School Board***

*A descriptive list of the plaintiffs is available [here](#).*

**Rachel Laser**, president and CEO of Americans United for Separation of Church and State

“A school that claims to be simultaneously public and religious would be a sea change for American democracy. It’s hard to think of a clearer violation of the religious freedom of Oklahoma taxpayers and public-school families than the state establishing a public school that is run as a religious school. We’re witnessing a full-on assault on church-state separation and public education – and religious public charter schools are the next frontier. America needs a national recommitment to church-state separation.”

**Daniel Mach**, director of the ACLU Program on Freedom of Religion and Belief

“The very idea of a religious public school is a constitutional oxymoron. Charter schools, like all public schools, must be open to all students, and they must be free from religious indoctrination. St. Isidore will be neither. The unprecedented decision to approve this religious charter school violates the separation of church and state and tramples the rights of Oklahoma taxpayers, students, and their families.”

**Robert Kim**, executive director of Education Law Center

“The Oklahoma Legislature created charter schools to be part of the public school system and to be open to all students. Allowing a religious charter school not only defies the will of the Legislature, but it also upends the very notion of public education by endorsing a school that has indicated it will refuse to abide by core principles, including non-discrimination requirements, that are essential to a public education system.”

**Annie Laurie Gaylor**, co-president of Freedom From Religious Foundation

“It’s unconscionable for the state of Oklahoma to be funding such an obviously sectarian religious school. This cannot be allowed to go unchallenged in our secular governmental system.”

**Misty Bradley**, Chair of OKPLAC (Oklahoma Parent Legislative Action Coalition)

“Religious liberty allows us to worship according to our faith. But forcing Oklahomans to fund religious teachings with their tax dollars is not religious freedom. It is state-sponsored religion, which violates the Oklahoma Constitution and the Oklahoma Charter Schools Act. Governmental sanctioning of a religious charter school drives a stake in the heart of religious liberty and seeks to eviscerate the fundamental precept of the separation of church and state.”

**Melissa Abdo**, treasurer of OKPLAC and member the Jenks Public Schools Board of Education and the Board of Directors of the Oklahoma State School Boards Association

“Oklahoma's Constitution requires taxpayers to fund a public school system that is open to all students in the state and free from sectarian control. That language could not be clearer. The vote by the Statewide Virtual School board to approve a religious public charter school violates the religious freedom of Oklahoma taxpayers by forcing them to pay for the religious education of others and serves to end the separation of church and state required by the Oklahoma Constitution. We Oklahomans cannot allow that to happen.”

**Krystal Bonsall**, parent of a public school student who has disabilities

“Ensuring that all Oklahoma children have access to a free and appropriate public education is an issue of vital importance to me and my family. Our public tax dollars should not be sent to a religious school that asserts a right to discriminate against students with disabilities. St. Isidore should not be allowed to divert scarce resources away from public schools that are open to all children regardless of ability, race, sexual orientation, gender identity, or religion.”

**Leslie Briggs**, the legal director of Oklahoma Appleseed Center for Law and Justice. She and her wife are parents of a child who will soon enter public schools

“I am invested in secular public schools because I believe in the Oklahoma Constitution and a founding principle of our nation: Religious freedom can only be preserved if the state does not establish or support any religion. I also find state-sanctioned discrimination abhorrent and refuse to accept my tax dollars being used to promote discrimination against children and families that look like mine.”

**Brenda Lené**, founder and operator of the Facebook group “Oklahoma Education Needs/Donations” and parent of a child in public school

“Giving public tax dollars to a school like St. Isidore not only opens the door to discrimination, but it also takes even more funding from our secular public schools and

teachers, which will have a disastrous effect on the already underfunded public education system and create more financial inequality. Too many teachers already have to ask for donations or spend money out of their own paychecks to buy basic school supplies needed to facilitate learning and keep their classroom running, while working a second job just to pay their bills. Creating religious public charter schools will only perpetuate that problem.”

**Michele Medley**, mother of three children, two of whom are autistic

“As the mother of two children on the autism spectrum, I have firsthand experience with private religious schools’ unwillingness to accept and meet the educational needs of students with autism and other developmental disabilities. I am also aware of the possible religious discrimination against LGBTQIA+ students that could harm my child and others. I don’t want my tax dollars to fund a charter school that won’t commit to adequately accepting and educating all students.”

**Dr. Bruce Prescott**, a retired educator and retired Baptist minister who served as executive director of Mainstream Oklahoma Baptists

“St. Isidore’s application makes clear that it plans to discriminate in admissions and employment. The government should never fund discrimination. No taxpayer-funded school should be allowed to turn away teachers or students because they are of the ‘wrong’ religion, or have a disability, or are involved in a same-sex relationship, or have a gender identity different than was assigned to them on a birth certificate, or simply become pregnant. Religious schools – like houses of worship – should be funded through voluntary contributions from their own membership, not money extracted involuntarily with state taxes from members of a religiously diverse community.”

**The Rev. Dr. Mitch Randall**, CEO of Good Faith Media

“As a Christian and citizen of the Muscogee (Creek) Nation, I oppose the state of Oklahoma funding religious charter schools. Coming from the Baptist tradition, the separation of church and state is a bedrock principle protecting religious liberty for every citizen. As an Indigenous person and great-grandson of a boarding school resident at Chilocco, Okla., it is appalling to think state leaders would reopen a door to a time when tax dollars were used to publicly fund the advancement of religion. These are two reasons our state’s founders wisely prohibited the use of taxpayer dollars to fund religious instruction.”

**The Rev. Dr. Lori Walke**, Senior Minister of Mayflower Congregational United Church of Christ

“As a pastor, I care deeply about religious freedom. But creating a religious public charter school is not religious freedom. Forcing taxpayers to fund a religious school that will be a ‘place of evangelization’ for one specific religion is not religious freedom. Diverting scarce public education resources to a religious school that can discriminate against children, families and staff is not religious freedom. True religious freedom requires separation of church and state, and our democracy requires public education that is open to all.”

**Erika Wright**, founder and leader of the Oklahoma Rural Schools Coalition

“Oklahoma’s public schools are among the lowest funded in the nation. Our state cannot afford to divert taxpayer dollars to unconstitutional religious schools. Due to high populations of poverty, rural public schools are more dependent on our state dollars than their suburban counterparts. Our rural schools are particularly vulnerable to the negative impacts of state funding loss. Public schools are the heartbeat of rural culture and public education dollars must be protected for inclusive, accountable public schools that welcome and serve ALL students.”

Distributed July 31, 2023.  
Americans United Contact: Liz Hayes, [lhayes@au.org](mailto:lhayes@au.org) or 724.493.2834