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Foundation**

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Dear Educator,

We at the Anti-Defamation League believe it is vital for young people to learn about the issues affecting society and their lives, form thoughtful opinions about these issues, and act and express themselves in accordance with their beliefs and conscience. In addition to this being an important part of a young person's personal growth, it also reflects constitutional rights protected by the First Amendment.

In 1943, the United States Supreme Court held that it is impermissible for a public school to coerce a student to stand for patriotic observances and displays. Student speech, including protest, that does not substantially disrupt the educational process is protected by the First Amendment and cannot legally be punished. Currently, many student athletes are expressing their beliefs by taking a knee while the National Anthem is played before sporting events. Whether on a school playing field or in a classroom, this is protected speech under the First Amendment.

The Supreme Court has long recognized the educational value in protecting student speech, including not compelling students to engage in patriotic rituals against their will. Protecting students' constitutional rights is not just a school's legal obligation: according to the Supreme Court, it is essential for "educating the young for citizenship." (*West Virginia State Board of Education v. Barnette*, 319 U.S. 624, 637 (1943)).

To compel students to recite or support a political or patriotic message—such as the Pledge of Allegiance or National Anthem—when they do not wish to do so contradicts the values upon which this country was founded, and violates the principles enshrined in the Bill of Rights.

If you have any questions or would like to be provided with further resources on this matter, please contact your regional ADL office (www.adl.org).

ADL Community Support Center

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