

U.S. Supreme Court got it right on parental rights and education

BY BJ JONES AND BRECKEN JONES

GUEST COMMENTARY

The recent Mahmoud v. Taylor Supreme Court decision affirmed the rights of parents to opt-out of public school LGBTQ+ lessons that undermine a family's religious beliefs. This is a crucial win for religious liberty and a victory for true inclusivity by expecting that religious families' beliefs don't stop at the classroom door.

This win is very personal for our family as we experienced hostility and were denied the ability to opt-out of radical transgender-promoting lessons for my 6-year-old in the Boulder Valley School District. Our family, like a majority of Americans, believes that our male or female identity is a fixed biological trait that cannot be changed. We want our daughter to grow up knowing that God made her wonderfully and perfectly in His image as a little girl. No matter how she feels inside, this is how God made her! However, our elementary school was teaching little learners that our family's Christian beliefs about how God made us were wrong and even "hateful."

Just like in the Maryland case that went to the Supreme Court, my district introduced transgender-promoting books and lessons under the guise of creating a "welcoming classroom." The school believed that, in order for "queer" kids being raised transgender to feel safe at school, all other students must be taught to believe and conform to the ideas of transgenderism. The lessons went far beyond encouraging kids to be kind. In our daughter's case, the classroom teacher taught students that gender is fluid and based on how you "feel inside." She then instructed the 6-year-old kids to choose their own gender. This is not mere "exposure" to diverse people groups, but rather lessons that were extremely manipulative, age-inappropriate, moralistic and even referred to young students' contrary faith beliefs as hateful.

The Supreme Court correctly identified the coercive and damaging nature of these lessons, stating, "Here, the (Maryland school) Board requires teachers to instruct young children using storybooks that explicitly contradict their parents' religious views, and it encourages the teachers to correct the children and accuse them of being 'hurtful' when they express a degree of religious confusion."

In our experience we were met with outright hostility for our Christian beliefs. Our family was disparaged in the hallways of the school by the music teacher. Activists, in coordination with district employees, organized a hostile mob of transgender activists at a school board meeting who booed and hissed our family for our Christian beliefs—all over an opt-out request!

We were one of many families forced to leave our school because of the hostility shown to those of religious faiths. Some claim that if religious families don't like these lessons, we must homeschool or pay for private. However, excluding the religious from school over objections to controversial lessons is a further means of financial coercion for families to "conform" and accept this radical instruction. The Supreme Court agrees, saying "It is both insulting and legally unsound to tell parents that they must abstain from public education in order to raise their children in their religious faiths, when alternatives can be prohibitively expensive and they already contribute to financing the public schools."

A sexuality lesson promoting the radical beliefs of transgenderism to 6-year-olds is highly divisive and inappropriate in the first place. However, we celebrate that families now—at the very least—have the right to opt-out of these lessons and can no longer be coerced to abandon their beliefs.

As Justice Alito writes, "A classroom environment that is welcoming to all students is something to be commended, but such an environment cannot be achieved through hostility toward the religious beliefs of students and their parents."

BJ and Brecken Jones were plaintiffs in a 2020 federal civil rights lawsuit (Jones v. Boulder Valley School District RE-2) resulting from being denied the right to opt-out their young elementary kids from material in a case similar to Mahmoud v. Taylor. The case was settled in 2021.