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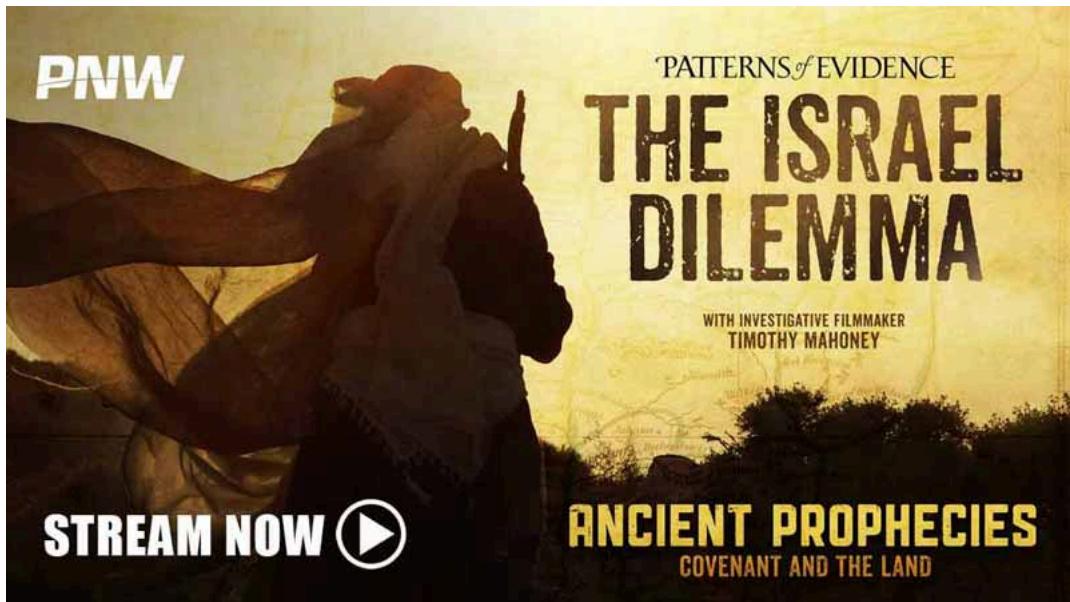
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## ARTICLE

Conform Or Be Fired: Teacher Removed After Refusing To Promote Same-Sex Marriage



BY HABRIGERS DAILY/DECISION MAGAZINE FEBRUARY 24, 2026

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A Tennessee elementary school teacher--who was reassigned job duties after objecting to reading two books to his students that advocate for same-sex marriage--has taken legal action against Nashville school administrators.

The Texas-based nonprofit religious liberty law firm First Liberty Institute sent a demand letter Feb. 17 to officials at the KIPP Antioch College Prep Elementary School on behalf of Eric Rivera, a former first-grade teacher, demanding that the school clear his record and adopt policies that protect teachers' religious accommodations. The letter also asks the school to ensure that parents are notified when topics of sexuality will be discussed.

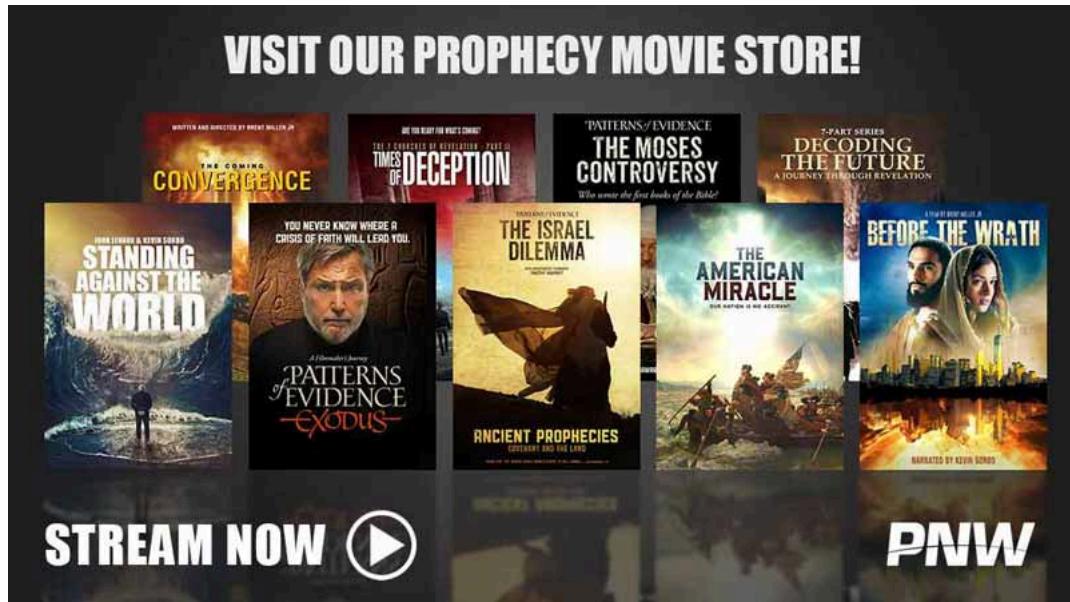
"Requiring a teacher violate their religious beliefs in order to keep their job is blatant discrimination that violates the Civil Rights Act," said Cliff Martin, senior counsel at First Liberty Institute. "Our client cares deeply about his students and simply has a religious objection to teaching certain lessons and asked for a simple religious accommodation. The school has sent the message that anyone who has a traditional view of marriage is unfit to teach first grade."

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The school's first-grade curriculum requires that teachers read a book to students that features a same-sex married couple and their daughter. Rivera, a devout Christian, said he could not in good conscience read such books to his students. Consequently, Rivera asked another colleague who agreed to read the book to his students on Jan. 6, the day it was scheduled per the curriculum.

The next day, Rivera was summoned to the principal's office and threatened with termination unless he forfeited his beliefs and agreed to teach all books in the curriculum regardless of his convictions, First Liberty contends in its letter to school officials.

According to a "Final Warning" memo issued by Principal Brittnee Kennedy to Rivera on Jan. 7, Rivera must "Maintain fidelity to the curriculum, teaching all lessons in the KIPP Nashville Scope and Sequence" and "Use the materials, books and resources provided by the curriculum."



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When Rivera sought a religious accommodation, he was instead reassigned to a lab and technology teaching position, followed by a kindergarten teaching position.

According to First Liberty's letter, "... the principal indicated that the belief in same-sex marriage is so fundamental to the language arts unit that Mr. Rivera could not possibly be permitted to teach any portion of the unit, and therefore had to be removed from the first-grade classroom."

In the letter, attorneys explain, "Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 established that it is unlawful for an employer to discriminate against any individual with respect to religion and also requires employers to accommodate employees' religious practices unless doing so would impose an 'undue hardship' on the conduct of the employer's business." The letter continues, "KIPP cannot demonstrate any undue hardship here. Therefore, KIPP failed to reasonably accommodate Mr. Rivera in violation of Title VII of the Civil Rights Act."

Rivera's attorneys also contend that KIPP may be in violation of parental rights under the United States Constitution and Tennessee law, citing to the recent Supreme Court decision in *Mahmoud v. Taylor* and to Tennessee legislation requiring parental notification of "sexual orientation or gender identity curriculum."

"Both of the books to which Mr. Rivera objected require parental notification under Tennessee law, and to our knowledge, none was given," the attorneys' letter stated. "Accordingly, based on our understanding of KIPP'S practices, KIPP should review whether it is in compliance with its obligations to parents under Tennessee and federal law."

The law firm's demand letter also asks the school to preserve records, including current curricula and documents tied to adoption and enforcement, "in anticipation of litigation."

"It's outrageous to send this message: 'Believe as we do or be terminated,'" Martin told FOX News Digital. "Teachers don't forfeit their religion or religious beliefs when they enter the classroom, nor can they be forced to believe what their employers prefer."

The Nashville elementary school is governed by a local community board of directors and is part of a national network of public charter schools. First Liberty has requested a written response to their letter from school officials no later than Feb. 27.

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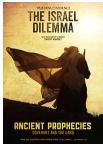
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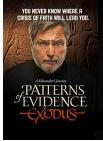
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