

NEW YORK CITY SUED FOR RELIGIOUS DISCRIMINATION

A lawsuit has been filed by the Thomas More Law Center against the City of New York, Schools Chancellor Joel Klein and another school official challenging the Department of Education's policy regarding "Holiday Displays": the policy allows the display of the Jewish Menorah and the Islamic Star and Crescent while banning the Christian religious holiday symbol, the Nativity Scene. Catholic League president William Donohue helped arrange the lawsuit and issued the following remarks today:

"Last December and January, I wrote several letters to then-Schools Chancellor Harold Levy and Chad Vignola, General Counselor to the Chancellor, protesting the Department of Education's 'Holiday Display' policy. That policy expressly allows the display of 'secular holiday symbol decorations' such as 'Christmas trees, Menorahs and the Star and Crescent.' It was this policy that was used to justify the banning of a Nativity Scene. But it is disingenuous to maintain that the Menorah is not as fully religious in heritage as the Nativity Scene is (the Thomas More brief also asserts the religious nature of the Star and Crescent).

"The disagreement I had with Mr. Vignola on this matter did not result in a lawsuit last year because I did not have time to find a plaintiff that would grant us standing. But we did find someone early this year, Andrea Skoros, a Catholic League member from Queens. I then contacted my friend at the Thomas More Law Center in Michigan, Richard Thompson (the Center's president), to see if he wanted to take the case. He agreed and put attorney Robert Muisse on it. So when the Catholic League learned this fall that Mr. Vignola was not going to change the 'Holiday Display' policy, a decision to file suit was made.

"It is outrageous that New York City public school officials allow some religious symbols in the schools every December while banning others. Catholics are sick and tired of being discriminated against by bureaucrats who tell us we should be satisfied with a Christmas tree in the schools. No, we want the real thing—the manger scene—and will not accept a secular substitute. All we want is parity with Jews and Muslims."