

Moment of silence case indicates importance of teacher training, CLC director says

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DALLAS—A case challenging the moment of silence in schools illustrates the need for training teachers on how to handle issues dealing with religion in schools, according to the director of the Baptist General Convention of Texas Christian Life Commission.

David Wallace Croft is suing Gov. Rick Perry and the Carrollton-Farmers Branch Independent School District in an effort to end the minute of silence. He argues it is unconstitutional because it amounts to the state endorsing prayer.

According to the lawsuit, a teacher told Croft's son, who attends Rosedale Elementary School, the minute of silence was specifically for prayer, and then the teacher prayed.

CLC Director Suzii Paynter, who worked on minute of silence legislation

authored by Sen. Jeff Wentworth (R-San Antonio), said the law is constitutional, but the teacher apparently mishandled the situation.

Situations like these can be prevented by following principles outlined in Texas Education Agency training sessions, Paynter said.

“The most common problem with the minute of silence and confusion with mandatory prayer is when teachers have difficulty expressing the purpose and limits of the minute of silence,” she said.

“It appears that in Carrollton, the problem for Mr. Croft’s child resulted from a classroom comment by a teacher, not as a result of an unconstitutional law. The most common-sense remedy for a situation like this is proper and thorough training for teachers. Texas provides the opportunity for this training currently in the staff development code for Texas schools.

“Staff development training on prayer in schools is an option for every school district in required teacher training. Unfortunately, many school districts do not choose this option for training and teachers are not prepared adequately to handle questions or confusion regarding the minute of silence.”

Instructors must understand how to be neutral regarding religion in the classroom, said Paynter, a former teacher. Students can reflect, pray, meditate or do nothing during the minute of silence, and teachers must let students know that.

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