

**UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
EASTERN DISTRICT OF VIRGINIA
Richmond Division**

Z.J.W., by next friends and parents, TERESA
CATOE and JOHN WHEELER;

and

A.A.P., by next friend and parent, SUSAN
PARK

Plaintiffs,

v.

KING GEORGE COUNTY SCHOOL
BOARD; DR. JESSE BOYD, in his official
capacity as Superintendent of King George
County Schools; and DR. CASEY NICE, in
his official capacity as Principal of King
George Middle School,

Defendants.

Case No. 3:26-cv-00775-REP

DECLARATION OF SUSAN PARK

I, Susan Park, pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1746, hereby declare under penalty of perjury:

1. I make this declaration of my own personal knowledge, and, if called as a witness, I could and would testify competently to the matters stated herein.
2. I am 57 years old. I live in King George County with my two children and have lived here for the past eighteen years. Both my children attend school in the King George County School District.
3. My youngest child, A.A.P., graduated from King George Middle School (“KGMS”) this past May, and will be starting as a ninth grader at King George High School (“KGHS”) in the fall.
4. Last September, at the beginning of his eighth-grade year, A.A.P. came home from school and told me a Gay-Straight Alliance (“GSA”) was forming at KGMS. He was so excited

about the club. I was happy to hear students were starting a GSA because I thought it would be a good space for them to have more support and community.

5. Shortly after, I saw a post on a community Facebook page opposing the formation of the GSA. Within the first day or two of being posted, I saw it had received dozens of hateful comments from parents opposed to the idea of having a GSA.
6. Attached as Exhibit A is a true and accurate copy of John McClane's Sept. 16, 2025, Facebook Post.
7. That same week, on September 18, 2025, I received a KGMS parent-wide email from the principal, Dr. Casey Nice, stating that he, the superintendent, Dr. Jesse Boyd, and the King George County School Board ("School Board") had made "the decision to pause the start of the proposed student-led GSA club until further notice." The email made clear to me that the club was being paused in response to the Facebook posts, which Dr. Nice characterized as a "division in the community."
8. I was upset by the school's response and replied to Dr. Nice's email, telling him that I was so disappointed a minority of people in King George forced a pause in the GSA club's formation. I told Dr. Nice I believed the people commenting hateful things on Facebook were out of touch and misinformed and that "we both know these types of groups can only benefit kids who need to feel a sense of belonging and community in a world that seems to constantly denigrate and devalue them."
9. Attached as Exhibit B is a true and accurate copy of my Sept. 18, 2025, email to Dr. Nice.
10. The next day, on September 19, 2025, I sent another email to the School Board members and Dr. Boyd. In my email, I stated that the students requesting the GSA should be afforded the same opportunity as other student organizations: a safe place to meet, connect, and

support one another. I also brought up that research shows schools with GSAs have lower rates of bullying and stronger student engagement overall, creating a safer, kinder environment for all students. I wanted Dr. Boyd and the School Board members to consider the effects that prohibiting the GSA would have on all students, not just students who would want to join the club.

11. Attached as Exhibit C is a true and accurate copy of my Sept. 19, 2025, email to Dr. Boyd and the School Board.
12. I later learned that other parents had sent threatening emails to school officials. One parent wrote to Dr. Boyd on September 16, 2025, accusing school personnel of engaging in “illegal” communications with minors about “illicit” matters and threatening to press charges against “whoever the adult counselor providing ‘education and advice’ may be.”
13. Attached as Exhibit D is a true and accurate copy of Bonnie Odom’s Sept. 16, 2025, email to Dr. Boyd.
14. A few days later, on September 22, 2025, Dr. Nice replied to my email. Dr. Nice stated that the school was “exploring options to provide a club that will support students who wish to participate in a safe and welcoming environment.” This suggested to me that the school wanted the students to create a club that did not explicitly support LGBTQ+ views because the school did not want to, even implicitly, be associated with the viewpoints of a GSA.
15. Attached as Exhibit E is a true and accurate copy of Dr. Nice’s Sept. 22, 2025, email to me.
16. In addition to feeling disappointed that all students would be worse off without a GSA, I was sad to see how much the school’s “pause” of the GSA affected A.A.P. When he learned that the GSA was not allowed to form, he was saddened and devastated. He had been very excited

about the prospect of the club and making new friends, and he couldn't understand why there was such a sudden change.

17. A.A.P. had heard there was a School Board meeting the evening of September 22, 2025, where people would be speaking on behalf of the GSA, and he asked if we could also give public comment. We both decided to prepare public comments expressing why we believed blocking the GSA infringed upon the rights of KGMS students.
18. At the Board meeting, I told the School Board that the GSA was about safety, community and kindness, things we should be promoting in our schools. I ended my statement by saying that I hoped they would let compassion, fairness, and our shared commitment to our children's wellbeing guide them.
19. After attending the September School Board meeting, it became clear to me that the School Board wanted to permanently prohibit the GSA from meeting at KGMS.
20. A.A.P. told me he had gotten to know the student who had initially proposed the GSA, Z.J.W., and that the two of them were continuing to advocate for the club. I was proud of A.A.P. for standing up for himself, his rights, and the rights of his peers.
21. I continued to stay engaged in what was happening too, including outside of the School Board meetings, because I wanted to support my son and believed what the school was doing was not only wrong but potentially even illegal. For instance, I spoke with Dr. Nice several times over the phone and in passing when I visited the school. When we talked, Dr. Nice told me that he wanted to support the club and he sympathized with us.
22. For example, on November 20, 2025, I went to pick up A.A.P. for an appointment. While I was waiting in the office, Dr. Nice saw me and asked to speak with me privately. He told me that the School Board had approved a new policy prohibiting "noncurricular" clubs at the

middle school and, because of this, that the GSA would not be allowed to form. He also said that the current clubs, including a book club, robotics club, and community service club, would be allowed to continue because they are “curricular.”

23. I later learned that in emails with a reporter, and internal emails between school officials, school officials expressed their beliefs that the revised IGDA did “not impact any existing student groups” at KGMS because “[t]here were no groups that were non-curricular meeting.”
24. Attached as Exhibit F is a true and accurate copy of the Nov. 19, 2025, emails between Amanada Higgins and Adele Uphaus. Attached as Exhibit G is a true and accurate copy of Nov. 19, 2025, emails between Amanda Higgins and Dr. Nice.
25. I later also saw internal KGMS emails and emails between the school and parents confirming that the KGMS policy had broadly allowed student clubs to form until the backlash to the GSA.
26. Attached as Exhibit H is a true and accurate copy of Dr. Nice’s Sept. 16, 2025, Draft FoxBytes email. Attached as Exhibit I is a true and accurate copy of Dr. Nice’s Sept. 17, 2025, email to Carey Ann Smith.pdf
27. I also saw emails from Dr. Nice suggesting he believed that the GSA had complied with KGCS Policy IGDA when it was proposed.
28. Attached as Exhibit J is a true and accurate copy of Dr. Nice’s Sept. 19, 2025, email to Charles Butka.
29. A few days after I spoke with Dr. Nice in person, I checked the KGMS Club page on the KGMS website and saw that none of the clubs that were listed before the policy change had been removed. Based on the website, it appeared that all of these clubs were continuing to

meet. I later found out that the Yearbook Club had also been allowed to continue meeting, when I saw photos of the club in the back of A.A.P.'s yearbook. I was shocked and angered to hear that, in effect, the new policy allowed all existing clubs to continue, while denying only the GSA the ability to form and meet.

30. Attached as Exhibit K is a true and accurate copy of relevant pages of the KGCS 2025-2026 Yearbook with faces and names redacted to protect minors' privacy in accordance with FRCP 5.2.

31. I also looked back at the school district's student organization policy, IGDA, and saw that the School Board had changed the policy to state that "King George High School students may organize and conduct meetings of non-curriculum-related groups." Prior to this revision, the policy referred to "secondary school" students generally. The revised policy did not include any mention of the middle school. I later saw an email from Dr. Nice that confirmed that, prior to the policy change, KGMS allowed noncurricular clubs as a secondary school. Exhibit J, Sept. 19, 2025, email from Dr. Nice to Charles Butka.

32. I did not initially see a definition of "curricular" or "non-curricular" in the policy, so I sent Dr. Nice an email asking if there was a definition the administration or School Board was using. Dr. Nice replied to my email the next morning that, "Curriculum-related student organizations are an extension of the regular school program. Their function is to enhance the participants' educational experience and supplement course materials. The activities of these organizations should bear a clear relationship to the regular curriculum."

33. Attached as Exhibit L is a true and accurate copy of Dr. Nice's Dec. 3, 2025, email to me.

34. Because A.A.P. and I continued to advocate for the students, I got to know Z.J.W.'s parents, John Wheeler and Teresa Catoe, and we had lunch together on December 15, 2025. We

spoke generally about our kids, their school experiences, and how proud we were of them for advocating for the GSA. We also decided we would all attend the next School Board meeting together on January 7, 2026, and speak in support of the GSA.

35. A.A.P. was very excited to have another opportunity to attend a Board meeting and speak in favor of the GSA. Even though it had now been months since the GSA's application was initially "paused," A.A.P. remained steadfast in his desire to form and join the club.

36. At the January 7, 2026, Board meeting, I once again gave public comment about the importance of a GSA. In my comments, I talked about research showing that GSA clubs benefit the mental health of LGBTQ+ students. I wanted to share that this club could have profound benefits for many students at KGMS. Several other students at that meeting also spoke, saying a GSA would be helpful for their mental health.

37. When responding to the public comments during the meeting, Dr. Boyd seemed to misinterpret what I and the students had said. He suggested that discussions of mental health and suicide would take place in the GSA, which was not what we had stated. I was frustrated by this mischaracterization. I felt that Dr. Boyd had twisted our statements to suggest that if students were having mental health issues, they should see a school counselor instead of participating in a GSA.

38. Later that night, I wrote an email to Dr. Boyd explaining that his remarks reflected a misunderstanding of the GSA's intent. I explained that the GSA was not meant to be peer or group therapy sessions, but simply a place where being LGBTQ+ is accepted and not viewed as strange or wrong. The club would give students a chance to do typical youth activities like arts, crafts, and board games, and to discuss everyday topics like books and movies. The point of a GSA is to build community and friendships and to lessen the loneliness and

isolation that LGBTQ+ and many other youth often feel. I also emphasized that, consistent with school policy and all other clubs at KGMS, the GSA would be under teacher supervision and guidance.

39. Attached as Exhibit M is a true and accurate copy of my Jan. 7, 2026, email to Dr. Boyd.

40. A few days later, on January 9, 2026, I wrote another email to Dr. Boyd and the School Board reiterating these points. Dr. Boyd replied to my email that there were “possible safety concerns with the club as envisioned by some.” I replied back to Dr. Boyd’s email clarifying my points and once again noting that the GSA would offer the well-documented benefits of inclusive, student-led spaces for LGBTQ+ students to connect and seek support.

41. Attached as Exhibit N is a true and accurate copy of my Jan. 9, 2026, email exchange with Dr. Boyd.

42. On January 20, 2026, A.A.P. had a private meeting with Dr. Nice and Dr. Boyd. A.A.P. told me that both Dr. Nice and Dr. Boyd had once again suggested the students could propose a club that would be approved, but only if it was not LGBTQ+ focused. A.A.P. told me he said no. I was proud of A.A.P. for standing up for himself and his peers and refusing to settle for a club that did not reflect what they were advocating for.

43. Following A.A.P.’s meeting with Dr. Nice and Dr. Boyd, I wanted to clarify the offer that had been presented. On January 22, I sent Dr. Nice an email asking if it was still an option to move forward with a club that did not use the title “GSA” and did not focus primarily on LGBTQ+ issues. Dr. Nice replied that he believed “if a club were proposed, such as a Kindness Club or a similar organization, that aligns with the underlying intent of GSA without engaging in discussion related to sexuality or LGBTQ topics, the School Board may be more receptive to considering a future revision of Policy IGDA to allow non-academic

clubs at KGMS. Framing the focus around supporting students' sense of belonging at the middle school level, rather than around specific issues or labels, may make the proposal more approachable for some board members." This response indicated to me that the change to IGDA had been made solely to prevent the GSA from forming.

44. Attached as Exhibit O is a true and accurate copy of the Jan. 22, 2026, email exchange between me and Dr. Nice.
45. Because of the discrepancies between what I was hearing on the phone and in person from Dr. Nice and the text of the policy, I decided to send a Freedom of Information Act ("FOIA") request to KGCS for information on internal communications about the GSA and new policies.
46. Attached as Exhibit P is a true and accurate copy of my Jan. 22, 2026, FOIA Request.
47. The emails I received in response to my FOIA request provided more evidence that the "pause" of the GSA and subsequent changes to IGDA were ideologically motivated. I was frustrated to see further proof that the policy changes were driven by a desire to stop the GSA from forming, based on the viewpoints the club intended to express. For example, some emails revealed the Board and administration considered the "real question" to be whether "gender and sexuality are appropriate topics for preteen students."
48. Attached as Exhibit Q is a true and accurate copy of Dr. Boyd's Oct. 13, 2025, email.
49. The emails revealed that the initial "pause" was in response to the "anger and division" and "significant upset within our community."
50. Attached as Exhibit R is a true and accurate copy of the Dr. Nice's Sept. 17, 2025, email to KGCS School Board.

51. They also revealed that while Dr. Nice “understood there would be some negative response from the community when [he] approved the formation of th[e GSA],” he “never dreamed it would reach the levels [they] saw on social media.”
52. Attached as Exhibit S is a true and accurate copy of Dr. Nice’s Sept. 18, 2025, email to Jeremy Leavitt.
53. Dr. Boyd also wrote to School Board member Carrie Cleveland that he was “cognizant of how quickly polarizing th[e GSA] issue became, therefore we placed the [GSA] club application on hold...”
54. Attached as Exhibit T is a true and accurate copy of Dr. Nice’s Sept. 22, 2025, email to Carrie Cleveland.
55. While reviewing the FOIA responses, I read that Dr. Nice understood that the GSA was an “optional after-school club,” “[l]ike other [KGMS] student clubs,” where students “could feel safe, supported, and connected to peers,” and that Dr. Boyd had also approved of the GSA initially.
56. Attached as Exhibit U is a true and accurate copy of Dr. Nice’s Sept. 17, 2025, email to K Fines. Attached as Exhibit V is a true and accurate copy of Dr. Boyd and Dr. Nice Sept. 16, 2025, email exchange.
57. It concerned me to read that the school was open to “adding curriculum” to existing classes in order to allow certain clubs to form—but only those whose views the school approved of—while still relying on the policy to block others. For example, a KGMS staff member stated in November 2025 that Dr. Nice “is going to see whether he can connect [Fellowship of Christian Athletes] to the curriculum for [the] leadership class, in which the meetings would likely be fine” and Dr. Nice replied to the staff member that he would “work with Dr.

Boyd” to see about pursuing the FCA. No offer was made to attempt to connect the GSA to curriculum.

58. Attached as Exhibit W is a true and accurate copy of the Nov. 19, 2025, email exchange between Austin Noel and Lynn Kline. Attached as Exhibit X is a true and accurate copy of the Nov. 21, 2025, email exchange between Dr. Nice and Austin Noel.

59. I also saw that Dr. Nice had proposed an alternative “PRISM Club,” a club promoting tolerance and acceptance of LGBTQ+ people that didn’t include references to those identities in its name, to Dr. Boyd in September and Dr. Boyd asked to speak with Dr. Nice on the phone about this.

60. Attached as Exhibit Y is a true and accurate copy of the Sept. 18, 2025, messages between Dr. Boyd and Dr. Nice.

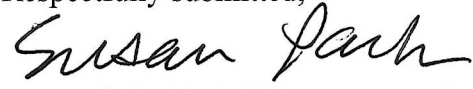
61. On March 6, 2026, in a meeting with Dr. Boyd, his assistant, Teresa Catoe, and myself, Dr. Boyd reiterated that the GSA was a very divisive topic and that club formation was not something he had power over. He said he was ceding his authority to the School Board and that the Board would not budge. As he had told Mr. Riley and A.A.P., Dr. Boyd again suggested that if the students called the club something else—such as a “Safe Space Group”—the Board might “go for it.” Teresa asked if he would allow middle school students to participate in the high school’s GSA club, but he did not answer. Dr. Boyd wanted to know if other middle schools permitted GSA clubs, and we responded that they did. Dr. Boyd also brought up his stated fear that the students would discuss mental health issues during club meetings. Teresa spoke very eloquently about why she felt the club was so important to our kids: to help them feel less alone at school and to give them an accepting space to have fun in community.

62. Both Teresa's and my children have struggled with being bullied and feeling isolated at school. Teresa and I felt the GSA would help them feel part of a positive, welcoming community.
63. A.A.P. has also left school without permission. A.A.P. told me he left school because things had been building up for some time and just got to be too much that day. I know A.A.P. struggled with bullying in middle school, and it saddened me that he felt he had to run away from school to be safe.
64. A.A.P. and I continued to advocate for the GSA and attended another School Board meeting on March 23, 2026. This meeting was difficult for me and especially for A.A.P. Several speakers made anti-LGBTQ+ comments attacking the GSA and its supporters. A.A.P. was so upset that he cried in the car on the way home. It was painful to see how deeply A.A.P. was affected by the anti-LGBTQ+ sentiment, and it reinforced exactly why I believe it is essential to have a welcoming environment for students.
65. Although A.A.P. has now graduated from KGMS and is entering KGHS, I know how much the GSA being unable to meet hurt him this year. He was deprived of a meaningful, supportive community for the entire school year, and instead had to cope with bullying and anti-LGBTQ+ harassment largely on his own. I believe that if he had been able to join the GSA from the beginning of the year, his eighth-grade experience would have been markedly different.
66. I hope the School Board will recognize that their actions are wrong and illegal, and that KGMS students in the future will have the opportunity to join the GSA that A.A.P. was denied. I wanted my child to participate in the GSA and would have given permission if the School Board had not prevented the club from meeting. My child was denied that

opportunity because the School Board and administration targeted LGBTQ+-affirming speech.

Executed this 4th day of August 2026

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Susan Park". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above a horizontal line.

Susan Park