No. 22-15827

UNITED STATES COURT OF APPEALS
FOR THE NINTH CIRCUIT

FELLOWSHIP OF CHRISTIAN ATHLETES,
AN OKLAHOMA CORPORATION, ET AL.

Plaintiffs-Appellees,

v.

SAN JOSE UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT BOARD OF EDUCATION, ET AL.,

Defendants-Appellants,

APPEAL FROM THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE
NORTHERN DISTRICT OF CALIFORNIA

4:20-CV-02798-HSG (HON. HAYWARD S. GILLIAM, JR.)

BRIEF OF AMICI CURIAE STATE OF MONTANA AND 18 OTHER STATES SUPPORTING PLAINTIFFS-APPELLANTS AND REVERSAL

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

TABLE OF AUTHORITIES

Cases

Other Authorities

Federal Rules of Appellate Procedure

INTERESTS OF AMICI CURIAE

The States of Montana, Alabama, Arkansas, Arizona, Florida, Georgia, Indiana, Kansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, Missouri, Nebraska, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Texas, Utah, Virginia, and West Virginia ("States") have compelling state interests in protecting the First Amendment rights of their citizens, including students attending public schools.[1] The amici States additionally have an interest in ensuring that all students, regardless of viewpoint, have a place in the public school system and that school officials do not favor secular student groups over religious ones.

INTRODUCTION

Non-discrimination laws can serve an admirable goal. But government officials often weaponize these non-discrimination laws to target religious groups. In the school setting, these non-discrimination laws—by their own terms—threaten to eliminate most affinity groups that form to advance specific, unique interests. The fact that affinity groups exist, though, indicates that these non-discrimination laws often

[1] The amici States file this brief under Federal Rule of Appellate Procedure 29(a)(2), which permits them to "file an amicus brief without the consent of the parties or leave of court."

(and necessarily) apply inconsistently. That's how these non-discrimination laws become, in fact, discriminatory—they permit government officials to enforce them against groups those officials find objectionable, like religious groups. But the First Amendment does not "require the government to single out private religious speech for special disfavor." *Kennedy v. Bremerton School Dist.*, No. 21-418, slip op. at 12 (U.S. June 27, 2022). It instead "counsel[s] mutual respect and tolerance … for religious and nonreligious views alike." *Id.*

The clash between religious liberty and non-discrimination policies came to a head in the San Jose Unified School District (the "District"). Fellowship of Christian Athletes ("FCA") unites two passions—faith and athletics. FCA exists in thousands of schools nationwide and has been part of the District's community for over a decade. In recent years FCA—like many religious organizations—has come under attack.[2]

In San Jose, a District teacher announced that FCA holds "bullshit" views and that the District should treat FCA the same as a KKK club.

[2] *See, e.g.*, *Bozeman High students challenge Christian FCA club for not being inclusive*, NBC Montana (Nov. 13, 2019), https://nbcmontana.com/news/local/bozeman-high-students-challenge-christian-fca-club-for-not-bring-inclusive.

This launched a campaign that led the District to revoke institutional benefits to FCA clubs District-wide. At the same time, the District sanctioned a new student club—The Satanic Temple Club—which students formed to openly mock and protest FCA's meetings.

The District's actions violate both the Free Exercise and Free Speech clauses. Yet, in the face of outrageous facts and overwhelmingly contrary precedent, the district court concluded that FCA was not entitled to a preliminary injunction. This district court misfire constitutes an abuse of discretion.

In various ways, the District violated FCA's First Amendment rights. For three independent reasons, the District's actions violate the Free Exercise Clause and fail to survive strict scrutiny. The District's actions also violate the Free Speech Clause because they discriminate based on viewpoint and do not reasonably further the forum's purpose. Each of these challenges, alone, shows a clear constitutional violation. But together, they show a pattern of targeted discrimination against an organization that espouses values the District doesn't like.

BACKGROUND

FCA welcomes all students to become members and participate in the organization. But those seeking leadership roles in the organization must affirm and conduct themselves according to FCA's Statement of Faith, which recites basic tenet of orthodox Christian doctrine. Relevant here, that includes commitments to traditional beliefs about sex and marriage. FCA still welcomes as members those not willing to affirm this Statement of Faith, but they cannot hold leadership posts. No District student unwilling to affirm this Statement of Faith has ever sought to hold a leadership role.

The District recognizes student organizations through its Associated Student Body (ASB) program. 10-ER-2016–17, ¶ 5. This program provides a forum for student groups to organize based on shared interests or beliefs. Student organizations seek ASB status because of the benefits it provides. For example, the schools publicly list ASB organizations as official clubs, feature them in yearbooks, provide meeting spaces, and supply ASB funding. Like all other District programs and activities, the ASB program must abide by the district-wide policy, which forbids discrimination based on race, sex, sexual

orientation, and religion. 1-ER-4–5; 8-ER-1361; 9-ER-1724. In fall 2021, the District updated this policy (the "Policy") to require all ASB clubs "to permit any student to become a member or leader." 6-ER-1048. This update specifically targeted FCA, which requires leaders to affirm its Statement of Faith. 8-ER-1357 (statement of Deputy Superintendent that "[t]he FCA matter was the starting point for ensuring that we had the right guidance to all the schools").

The District, too, retains discretion in how it applies these policies. ECF No. 111, at 18–20. It permits its own programs and activities, like athletics, to discriminate based on otherwise forbidden criteria where there are sufficiently compelling governmental interests that justify the differential treatment. *Id.* Despite routinely permitting these groups to limit membership based on otherwise discriminatory factors, the District refused to extend this same permission to FCA.

The facts below are startling. While in class, one District teacher called FCA's views "objectionable" and "bullshit." 3-ER-404. Several teachers worked to derecognize FCA on one of the District's campus. 4-ER-575–76; 4-ER-590; 4-ER-614; 6-ER-914, 195:10-19. The decision to strip FCA of ASB approval was announced in the school newspaper

absent any consultation with FCA or its student leaders. 6-ER-1008; 8-ER-1396–97. Several teachers encouraged students to rally against FCA, forming The Satanic Temple Club to "openly mock" FCA's beliefs. 10-ER-2003. The teachers encouraged protests, confronted FCA guest speakers, and encouraged public ostracization of FCA's members. 5-ER-844; 4-ER-574–75; 10-ER-2002–03; 6-ER-1006; 6-ER-1060; 10-ER-1897; 10-ER-1912.

If these facts seem shocking, it's because they are shocking. The attack against FCA didn't start as a grassroots effort led by students upset with FCA's leadership requirements. It was an organized barrage led by teachers and school officials to stir up dissension and target students with whom they disagreed. And the District's response? "[T]he system worked in the way it's supposed to work." ER.1764. The District aggressively targeted FCA because of its religious tenets. That violated both the Free Exercise and Free Speech clauses of the First Amendment.

ARGUMENT

I. The District's Actions Violate the Free Exercise Clause.

The Free Exercise Clause of the First Amendment—applicable to States through the Fourteenth Amendment—establishes that "Congress

shall make no law … prohibiting the free exercise" of religion. "The Clause … protects the right to harbor religious beliefs inwardly and secretly," and—more importantly—it "protect[s] the ability of those who hold religious beliefs of all kinds to live out their faiths in daily life." *Kennedy*, slip op. at 12. Government entities do not get to decide whether such exercises of religion are "acceptable, logical, consistent, or comprehensible." *Thomas v. Review Bd. of Ind. Employment Security Div.*, 450 U.S. 707, 714 (1981). But the District nevertheless ventured in. It determined that FCA possesses unacceptable religious viewpoints and refused to recognize FCA as a student club, denying it access to all the benefits given to other student organizations. The District did this while simultaneously endorsing other discriminatory, pre-approved activities. 7-ER-1217 (Pioneer Activities Director stating that student clubs can limit their membership based on gender under the Policy); 9-ER-1677; 5-ER-851–53; 7-ER-1144; 2-ER-103; 2-ER-109; *see also* Defs.' Prelim. Inj. Opp'n at 18–20, No. 20-2798 (N.D. Cal. Sept. 3, 2021) (admitting that the District does not apply its policies "to all District programs and activities, or to all in precisely the same way"). The District's actions don't pass constitutional muster—the District lacks a compelling reason to treat

FCA differently than other organizations, and it fails to narrowly tailor its actions to support these interests.

A. The Court must review the District's actions under strict scrutiny.

The Court must review the District's discriminatory behavior under strict scrutiny because (1) the District exercises unrestrained discretion in considering exemptions from its policy; (2) the District grants exemptions unequally between student groups; and (3) the District has demonstrated open hostility toward FCA because of its religious views.

1. The District's policy gives the school board discretion over whether student groups are exempt from the policy.

Strict scrutiny doesn't apply to a neutral and generally applicable law. *Emp. Div. v. Smith*, 494 U.S. 872, 878-882. But a law applies discriminatorily when the government entity "proceeds in a manner intolerant of religious beliefs or restricts practices because of their religious nature." *Fulton v. City of Philadelphia*, 141 S. Ct. 1868, 1876 (2021). And when a government "consider[s] the particular reasons for a person's conduct by providing a mechanism for individualized exemptions," the law or policy is not generally applicable. *Id.*; *see also*

Church of Lukumi Babalu Aye v. City of Hialeah, 508 U.S. 520, 546 (1993). Strict scrutiny, therefore, applies.

The District's policy applies across the whole district and governs all student clubs, activities, and programs. It purports to ban discrimination based on criteria like race, sex, sexual orientation, and religion. 1-ER-4–5; 8-ER-1361; 9-ER-1724. Clubs seeking ASB approval submit applications to school officials, who review for compliance with this policy. 6-ER-994–1002. Once a club receives approval, the schools do not monitor or enforce this compliance. 5-ER-863–64; 7-ER-1164–65; 9-ER-1677–78; 9-ER-1682.

But the Policy permits exemptions in its express language and in practice. *See Fulton*, 141 S. Ct. at 1877. The Policy, for example, allows clubs to exclude students using "non-discriminatory criteria." 6-ER-1049; 9-ER-1737–38; 9-ER-1938–39, 7-ER-1249. School officials possess "common sense" discretion to apply these undefined criteria on a "case-by-case basis." 9-ER-1739–40; 7-ER-1202; 7-ER-1249. Certain organizations can exclude students based on age, GPA, enrolled student status, athletic competency, singing ability, and good civic character. 6-ER-1049; 7-ER-1213; 7-ER-1215; 7-ER-1249; 9-ER-1737–38; 9-ER-1938–

39; 9-ER-1741–42. In other words, when the District identifies what it deems a compelling reason to treat students differently, it does so. 9-ER-1626–32; 8-ER-1499 (District officials can engage in discrimination where they "believe" it "may influence the students' ability to be successful"); *see also* Defs.' Prelimin. Inj. Opp'n at 18-20, No. 20-2798 (N.D. Ca. Sept. 3, 2021).

And the District does so often.[3] For example, the Latino Male Mentor Group includes only "ninth-grade Latino male students." 9-ER-1816; 9-ER-1641; 9-ER-1644–47; 9-ER-1728–29. The Girls' Circle club offers membership only to "female-identifying students." 2-ER-164. The "Mr. GQ" and "Mr. Mustang" contests are annual male pageants, and during school-spirit week, schools host sex-segregated events. 10-ER-1966; 10-ER-1968; 10-ER-1970; 10-ER-1865; 6-ER-1008. Similarly, the District organizes the Male Summit Conference for "only males" to encourage graduation and higher education for boys. 9-ER-1821; 9-ER-

[3] The district court found that "the evidence regarding these examples does not support Plaintiffs' argument." *Fellowship of Christian Athletes v. San Jose Unified School District Bd. Of Ed.*, 20-cv-02798, Dkt. 102, at 17 (N.D. Cal. June 1, 2022). But FCA put forth evidence of affinity groups and events that exist solely based on the so-called discriminatory factors. *See e.g.*, 7-ER-1143–44; 7-ER-1217; see 10-ER-1935–45; 10-ER-2008–13; 9-ER-1677; 5-ER-851–53; 7-ER-1144; 2-ER-103; 2-ER-109; 7-ER-1217.

1646–47. Each of these student organizations seemingly violate the District's non-discrimination Policy. But because the school officials have identified compelling reasons to treat the students differently, the District approves these otherwise discriminatory organizations and activities. 9-ER-1632; 10-ER-1849; 10-ER-1855–57; 10-ER-1850–54; 9-ER-1728; 10-ER-1897. Despite an unmistakable pattern of granting exemptions, the District declined to grant one to FCA. In fact, it denied ASB status to FCA—the first and only time it has denied ASB status to any student group. 7-ER-1089–90.

"On the surface," non-discrimination policies seem like "an admirable goal," but this differential treatment exemplifies concerns over policies with discretion-based exemptions and shows why courts review them under strict scrutiny. 9-ER-1728–29. The discretion allows government entities to treat individuals or organizations differently based on arbitrary distinctions in violation of the Free Exercise Clause.

In this case, the District's policy is not generally applicable. The District gets to "consider the particular reasons" for "individualized exemptions" to its Policy. *Fulton v. City of Philadelphia*, 141 S. Ct. 1868, 1877, 1879 (2021). But the District "may not refuse to extend that system

[of individual exemptions] to cases of religious hardship," as it did here, without a compelling reason. *Smith*, 494 U.S. at 884. Laws with discretionary exemptions differ from neutral laws of general applicability, and the Court must apply a higher constitutional standard when reviewing these laws. *Id.* Given the District's "open-ended, purely discretionary" authority to issue exemptions to other student organizations, the Court must review the District's actions under strict scrutiny. *Stormans, Inc. v. Wiesman*, 794 F.3d 1064, 1081 (9th Cir. 2015).

2. The District gives exemptions to secular student groups.

The District's favorable treatment of secular student groups and activities also mandates strict scrutiny review. *Tandon v. Newsom*, 141 S. Ct. 1294, 1296 (2021); *see Fulton*, at 1877 ("If it prohibits religious conduct while permitting secular conduct that undermines the government's asserted interests in a similar way," the law is subject to strict scrutiny). The District treats comparable "secular activity more favorably than religious exercise." *Tandon*, 141 S. Ct. at 1296. And it treats them differently despite the same risks the activities pose. *Id.* FCA poses no different threat to the District's non-discrimination interests than the Girls' Circle or the Latino Male Mentor Group. The

only seeming difference, is the District's distaste for FCA's religious tenets.

To determine whether two activities are comparable when identifying differential treatment, the Court must consider "the asserted government interest that justifies the regulation at issue." *Tandon*, 141 S.Ct. at 1296. In *Lukumi*, for example, the city prohibited the "unnecessary" killing of animals. 508 U.S. at 524–28. The city claimed that the prohibition protected public health because of the threat posed by disposing of animal carcasses in the open. *Id.* at 544. But the city did not similarly regulate hunters disposing of animal carcasses or restaurants disposing of their garbage. *Id.* at 545. This regulatory scheme, therefore, was subject to—and failed—strict scrutiny. *Id.* at 545–46.

Like the city's policy in *Lukumi*, the District's Policy allows it to treat different student organizations differently—which the District indeed does. To school officials, it seems to matter greatly—indeed, dispositively—whether the exemption is for a ninth-grade male Latino student organization that excludes non-Latinos, non-males, and sophomores from membership or whether it's for a faith-based student

organization that excludes from leadership individuals who don't embrace basic Christian scruples. Does this disparate treatment makes sense in light of the District's interests in non-discrimination? *Tandon*, 141 S.Ct. at 1296. Here, it does not.

The District claims that FCA harms the District's interests in "equal access for all students to all programs" and in prohibiting discrimination on "enumerated bases" in all its school programs and activities. 9-ER-1722; 9-ER-1726; 8-ER-1361. But allowing only Latino ninth-grade males in the Latino Male Mentor Group and only female-identifying students in the Girls' Circle also harms these interests. Neither group offers equal access to membership—both expressly discriminate. Similarly, the District allows the National Honor Society to exclude individuals based on their "character," "GPA," "leadership," and service." 6-ER-1049; 9-ER-1737–38; 9-ER-1938–39; 7-ER-1249. It allows athletic teams and the Big Sister/Little Sister club to exclude individuals based on gender. 7-ER-1287–88; 10-ER-1990, ¶ 24; 5-ER-869–70; 9-ER-1677; 5-ER-851–53. And the South Asian Heritage Club "prioritize[s] south asian" membership. 2-ER-103; 2-ER-109; 7-ER-1217. Each of these clubs disturbs the District's interests in equal access for all

students to all programs—they explicitly exclude individuals based on discriminatory criteria. Yet the District approved each of these organizations.

The district court's conclusion that this case doesn't trigger strict scrutiny means that the government has a higher interest in restricting the requirements of a private leader in a private religious organization than in general membership in the school's other student clubs and activities. But "a law cannot be regarded as protecting an interest 'of the highest order' … when it leaves appreciable damage to that supposedly vital interest unprohibited." *Lukumi*, 508 U.S. at 547 (quoting *Florida Star v. B.J.F.*, 491 U.S. 524, 541–42 (1989) (Scalia, J., concurring in part and concurring in judgment)). Because the District permits some discrimination but prohibits other so-called discrimination, the policy "must undergo the most rigorous of scrutiny." *Lukumi*, 508 U.S. at 546.

3. The District exhibited animosity toward FCA.

Finally, the court must examine the Policy under strict scrutiny because the District has shown open hostility toward FCA. Under the Free Exercise Clause, if the government's actions raise "even slight suspicion" they "stem from animosity to religion or distrust of its

practices," they must survive strict scrutiny. *Lukumi*, 508 U.S. at 547. The Free Exercise Clause bars even "subtle departures from neutrality." *Id.* One "indication" of the government's failure to act neutrally is "the difference in treatment" it affords people of faith. *Masterpiece Cakeshop v. Colo. C.R. Comm'n*, 138 S. Ct. 1719, 1730 (2018).

The Supreme Court denounced this type of overt discrimination in *Masterpiece Cakeshop*. There, state officials punished a cake-shop owner who declined to create a custom wedding cake celebrating same-sex marriage because of his religious beliefs. 138 S. Ct. at 1730. These same officials, however, took no action against three other bakers "who objected … on the basis of conscience" to requests for "cakes with images that conveyed disapproval of same-sex marriage." *Id.* The Supreme Court noted that "[a] principled rationale … cannot be based on the government's own assessment of offensiveness." *Id.* at 1731. The Supreme Court thus determined that the state officials' decision was "inconsistent with what the Free Exercise Clause requires." *Id.* at 1732.

Other courts have concluded the same. The Tenth Circuit found a free exercise violation where a university unfairly granted a religious exemption to a Jewish but not a Mormon student. *Axson-Flynn v.*

Johnson, 356 F.3d 1277, 1282, 1298. The Third Circuit, likewise, held that a police department's no-beard policy violated the Free Exercise Clause because the department granted medical but not religious exemptions. *Fraternal Order of Police Newark Lodge No. 12 v. City of Newark*, 170 F.3d 359, 360–61 (1999). In these examples, government entities treated individuals disparately *because of* their religious beliefs and practices— far above the "slight suspicion" necessary to trigger strict scrutiny.

Here, the District displayed obvious and overt animosity toward FCA. School officials discussed FCA's "objectionable" statement of faith in class. 10-ER-1920. They described FCA's views as "bullshit" and without "validity." 10-ER-1897–98; 10-ER-1924–27. They described the FCA members as "charlatans." *Id*. They held protests outside FCA's meetings. 10-ER-1932; 10-ER-1973–81; 6-ER-1058–59; 10-ER-1947–48. They confronted guest speakers. ECF 137-5 at 6, ¶ 20. They encouraged school reporters to photograph FCA students and went so far as to call one of the reporters an "idiot" for "feel[ing] bad" for FCA. 10-ER-1892; 8-ER-1523.

The District's actions don't represent a subtle departure from neutrality or give rise to mere suspicion of animosity. Instead, they show a pattern of overt hostility toward FCA *because of its religious tenets*. *See Lukumi*, 508 U.S. at 547. The decision to revoke FCA's ASB approval, therefore, must be reviewed under strict scrutiny.

B. The District can't justify its conduct under strict scrutiny.

The District's behavior can only survive strict scrutiny if it advances "interests of the highest order" and achieves those interests through narrow tailoring. *Lukumi*, 508 U.S. at 546. The District can show neither.

The District expressed a broad and generalized interest in non-discrimination. But *Fulton* instructs that courts cannot rest this analysis on "broadly formulated interests." 141 S. Ct. at 1881 (quoting *Gonzales v. O Centro Espirita Beneficente Uniao do Vegetal*, 546 U.S. 418, 430–32 (2006)). Generalized interests in non-discrimination aren't enough. The analysis depends not on whether the District "has a compelling interest in enforcing its non-discrimination policies generally, but whether it has such an interest in denying an exception" to FCA. *Id.*

The District's decision to deny FCA an exemption from its Policy does not advance a "highest order" interest. *Lukumi*, 508 U.S. at 546; *see also Fulton*, 141 S. Ct. 1881. "[A] law cannot be regarded as protecting an interest of the highest order when it leaves appreciable damage to that supposedly vital interest unprohibited." *Lukumi*, 508 U.S. at 547. As discussed above, the District claims an interest in keeping student organizations open to all individuals. Yet the District allows specific organizations to close off membership altogether, selecting members based on specific criteria. But according to the District, FCA's leadership requirements harm the District's interests in non-discrimination while other organizations' overtly discriminatory membership requirements don't. No compelling reason, accordingly, explains why the District "has a particular interest in denying an exception" to FCA while making the same exceptions available to others. *Fulton*, 141 S. Ct. at 1882.

The District also failed to narrowly tailor its actions to promote these interests. If the District "can achieve its interests in a manner that does not burden religion, it must do so." *Fulton*, 141 S. Ct. at 1881. In other words, the District must show that its actions were "the least restrictive means" of achieving its interests. *Thomas v. Review Bd. Of*

Ind. Emp't Sec. Div., 450 U.S. 707, 718 (1981). It cannot, because the District continues to grant exemptions to other student groups, sports teams, and events. *See supra* Section I.B.

Because the District's unfavorable treatment of FCA isn't the least restrictive means of advancing any compelling government interest, the District's actions fail to survive strict scrutiny. This Court must reverse.

II. The District's Actions Violate the Free Speech Clause.

The District's actions also violate the Free Speech Clause because student groups like FCA must be able to select leaders who affirm their beliefs. In *Christian Legal Society v. Martinez*, the Supreme Court recognized that "[*w*]*ho* speaks" for student organizations "colors *what* concept is conveyed." 561 U.S. 661, 680 (2010). After all, a religious group's leaders "personify its beliefs." *Hosanna-Tabor Evangelical Lutheran Church & Sch. v. E.E.O.C.*, 565 U.S 171, 188 (2012). The "messenger matters." *Id.* at 201 (Alito, J., concurring). It follows, then, that an organization's control over who gets to lead the organization is "an essential component of its freedom to speak in its own voice, both to its own members and to the outside world." *Id.* FCA's requirement that

its leaders affirm its beliefs is essential to the organization's ability to speak to its members and the public.

Because leadership selection correlates with expressive speech, the Supreme Court notes that "expressive-association and free-speech arguments merge." *Martinez*, 561 U.S. at 680. These hybrid cases use the limited public forum test, which asks whether the District's actions (1) "discriminate against speech on the basis of … viewpoint" or (2) are not "reasonable in light of the purpose served by the forum." *Id.* at 685. Here, the District's actions discriminate based on viewpoint and do not reasonably serve the forum's purpose.

A. The District's actions discriminate against FCA because of its religious views.

"Viewpoint discrimination is poison to a free society …. At a time when free speech is under attack, it is especially important for this Court to remain firm on the principle that the First Amendment does not tolerate viewpoint discrimination." *Iancu v. Brunetti*, 139 S. Ct. 2294, 2302–03 (2019) (Alito, J., concurring). While the *Martinez* Court ultimately concluded that no discrimination existed, the Court reiterated that public universities may not "deny[] student organizations access to school-sponsored forums because of the groups' viewpoints." 561 U.S. at

668; *see also Gerlich v. Leath*, 861 F.3d 697, 709 (8th Cir. 2017) (condemning viewpoint discrimination involving benefits the public universities gave to recognized student groups). This Circuit, likewise, concluded that a university may not "exempt[] certain student groups from [its] nondiscrimination policy" while withholding the same exemptions from other groups because of their "viewpoint." *Alpha Delta Chi-Delta Chapter v. Reed*, 648 F.3d 790, 804 (9th Cir. 2011).

The District, here, clearly applied its policies in a discriminatory manner based on viewpoint. The District never revoked a student organization's status on campus until it revoked FCA's status, despite other groups' overt discriminatory membership criteria. Again, the Latino Male Mentor Group excludes all students except ninth-grade Latino males. The Girls' Circle excludes all students except female-identifying students. And sports teams exclude based on gender. In each of these examples, the organizations don't just exclude individuals from leadership opportunities—they exclude them *from membership altogether*. The difference, though, is that FCA's viewpoints are religious and—apparently—unpopular. The District's differential treatment

based upon an organization's viewpoint establishes a constitutional violation.

B. The District's actions don't reasonably advance the forum's purpose.

The Court must assess the District's actions "in light of the purpose of the forum and all the surrounding circumstances." *Cornelius v. NAACP Legal Def. & Educ. Fund, Inc.*, 473 U.S. 788, 809 (1985). The Court "owe[s] no deference" to the District. *Martinez*, 561 U.S. at 686. Instead, the Court looks to whether the District follows the "boundaries it has itself set." *Rosenberger v. Rector & Visitors of the Univ. of Va.*, 515 U.S. 819, 829 (1995). Here, the record reveals a District that defies its own rules—allowing groups to exclude individuals from membership based on classifications the District, itself, defines as discriminatory.

The purpose of the forum here—the ASB—is to help students form communities around "similar interests" with "other students that are like them." ER.405–06. These other groups can select members and leaders based on certain characteristics that advance the groups' purposes. But FCA, which opens membership to all, cannot select leaders based on criteria central to the organization's core purpose. Regardless of whether teachers, students, the District, or the district court find these criteria

offensive, FCA's leadership selection criteria further the forum's purpose because it furthers FCA's purpose. *See* 4-ER-652 (guaranteeing clubs "rights to express ideas … even when such speech is controversial or unpopular"). This unreasonable revocation of FCA's ASB status violates the Free Speech Clause.

CONCLUSION

Non-discrimination laws may be "admirable" "on the surface." ER.1035. But the District's isolated discrimination against FCA shows that its non-discrimination abets the District's punishment of disfavored beliefs and views. Because of the requirement that FCA's leaders affirm its Statement of Faith, the District refused to extend the same treatment as it does to other student organizations. The District's actions, therefore, violate the First Amendment, and this Court must reverse.

DATED this 5th day of July, 2022.

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CERTIFICATE OF COMPLIANCE

Pursuant to Rule 32(g) of the Federal Rules of Appellate Procedure, Kathleen Smithgall, an employee in the Office of the Attorney General of the Montana, hereby certifies that according to the word count feature of the word processing program used to prepare this brief, the brief contains 4,388 words, excluding the parts of the document exempted by Rule 32(f), and complies with the typeface requirements and length limits of Rules 29 and 32(a)(5)–(7), and Circuit Rule 29-2(c)(2).

/s/ *Kathleen L. Smithgall*
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