

For Immediate Release

**Bishop Unified School District to Pay \$400,000 and Conduct Training
for All Employees in Settlement Agreement for Harming Students
During COVID-19 Pandemic**

Bishop, California – May 11, 2023. With the help of retired U.S. Federal Judge Stephen G. Larson, Bishop Unified School District (BUSD) and a group of Parents who filed claims for damages for violation of their children’s civil rights finalized a settlement on April 27, 2023. Not only is the school district required to pay \$400,000 because of the harm suffered by the children, BUSD must also provide counseling and tutoring for the students, and training for all BUSD faculty and staff on “public health, response to public health emergencies, informed consent, and bullying/harassment/retaliation issues.”

Armed with vital information on Emergency Use Authorization (EUA) and informed consent laws from Health Freedom Defense Fund (HFDF) and its founder, Leslie Manookian, Bishop parents and residents began expressing concerns about BUSD’s handling of the COVID-19 pandemic at its August 2021 school board meeting. They urged BUSD to follow Title 21 U.S.C., the federal law for the use of EUA products, such as COVID-19 masks, testing, and vaccines. This law requires voluntary informed consent and the option to accept or refuse EUA products. The Parents also sought protection for students’ civil liberties and pleaded with board members to consider the negative outcomes of potentially punitive enforcement of what was merely state health guidance. BUSD instead implemented a medically nonsensical policy of handling school-based exposures, discriminatory COVID-19 testing based on vaccination status, and illegally excluding students from extracurriculars and sports.

“I was absolutely shocked when my daughter came home from middle school and reported how a staff member made her raise her hand in front of the whole class when asked about her vaccination status, and then she was escorted outside to be tested for COVID against her will - and without parental consent! My shock turned to anger when I saw how sad, embarrassed and violated she was by this incident. The very people entrusted with my daughter’s wellbeing and education were the ones causing her harm!” said Parent Ron Gladding.

BUSD ignored federal informed consent laws and committed many civil rights violations, including discrimination, segregation, bullying, harassment, retaliation and denial of a Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE). At one school, many healthy students were forced to remain outside in cold winter weather because they did not consent to wearing masks. Some unmasked students were segregated outside of classrooms while other children, also not wearing masks, were allowed to fully participate in normal classroom activities depending on the teacher. Some teachers even took steps to humiliate those kids they labeled as “protestors.” Healthy children were forced into independent study which is voluntary by statute. Students were denied schoolwork, notes, tests, and academic help from teachers and suffered significant learning loss, and were harmed emotionally. One student with disabilities was not allowed to remain in the classroom and was denied access to their Individualized Education Program (IEP) in violation of FAPE.

"My daughter was on the field for practice and her coach told her to put on a face mask even though there was no outdoor masking requirement. When she declined, she was told to keep her distance and stay away from the team or leave. She was made to stand alone by herself. She was completely embarrassed, but she stood up for herself. This humiliation went on for days." Parent Abby Veenker said.

"This should have never happened. Had BUSD listened to parents' requests and respected everyone's right to accept OR refuse EUA products as required by law, our children would not have been harmed." Parent Todd Thornburg said.

Searching for a way to hold BUSD accountable for what was happening to their kids, a parent found one of the many legal rights webinars presented by Tracy L. Henderson, Esq., founder of California Parents Union (CPU) aimed at empowering parents, grandparents and educators. After watching CPU's webinar on how to file tort claims against the school district, the Parents marched down the path of filing claims. In California, filing a tort claim, or damage claim form you obtain from your school district, is the first step required for an injured party to receive compensation from the government for damages or personal injury. Unsurprisingly, BUSD rejected the claims and referred the matter to its liability coverage provider, Self-Insured Schools of California (SISC).

"This is an important victory for all of the children in California who were emotionally and physically traumatized for their parents' decision to decline to mask, test or vaccinate their children with the experimental COVID injections. Many parents and educators, who knew what was happening was wrong, stood up. Some succeeded in stopping the harm and others did not. Now, all parents, grandparents and educators are vindicated." Tracy L. Henderson, Esq., California Parents Union Founder, said.

Helena Sunny Wise, Esq., counsel for Freedom To Choose USA generously offered her services and legal expertise to the Parents when she heard of their battle with BUSD, and efforts to settle the claims began in May 2022. The Parents and Ms. Wise repeatedly presented the relevant facts, law, and California Education Code to SISC. They were relentless and obtained copies of "smoking gun" emails between BUSD faculty and staff which corroborated the claims of civil rights violations. SISC was unresponsive during the process and ultimately, Ms. Wise had to request mediation so that a resolution could be reached. SISC hired Judge Larson to mediate the dispute and a meeting took place in January of 2023. Shortly thereafter, Judge Larson proposed a settlement, both parties accepted, and the matter was concluded. BUSD must pay \$400,000 and the district has twelve months to implement the mandatory training for its employees.

"Although retired Federal Judge Larson was told by SISC that nothing had happened except for a few days out of the entire school year when a mask protest took place, persistence and the importance of telling the truth proved otherwise. These are not irrational parents as claimed by

SISC. The damages began in August of 2021 and continued into the following school year.”
Helena S. Wise, Esq., legal counsel for the Parents, said.

“The training required by Judge Larson should be implemented by every school district in California and across the nation as civil rights violations were not limited to BUSD. All Americans should be educated about informed consent laws so children’s and parents’ rights are never trampled again. HFDF and CPU are honored to have been asked by BUSD parents to conduct community trainings on these issues and plans are underway.”
Leslie Manookian, Health Freedom Defense Fund Founder, said.

Helena S. Wise, Esq. graduated from Burroughs High School in Ridgecrest, California. Thereafter, she attended UCLA and Loyola Law School. Ms. Wise is legal counsel for Freedom To Choose USA (www.freedomtochooseusa.com), as well as Firefighters 4 Freedom (www.firefightersforfreedom.org), and has in the past represented employees and their unions, including at one point the United Teachers of Los Angeles.

Leslie Manookian is the president of Health Freedom Defense Fund, the organization responsible for successfully challenging the Biden Administration’s federal travel mask mandate that removed masks on airplanes because the CDC had no authority to mandate them. (www.healthfreedomdefense.org)

Tracy L. Henderson, Esq. is a mom, licensed California Attorney and the founder of California Parents United and the new 501(c)(4) California Parents Union. (CPU) (www.californiaparentsunion.com) (www.californiaparentsunited.org)

Bishop Parent Group includes Todd Thornburg, Erin and Ron Gladding, Lisa Johnston, Alisa and Dan Morley, Tanya Kimbrel, Jamie and Chris Sexton, Amber Olson, and Abby and Steven Veenker.