



Attorney General Doug Peterson

News Release

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15 State Attorneys General defend student groups' freedom to choose leaders that share their beliefs

Lincoln – Today, Attorney General Peterson was joined by attorneys general from 14 states in filing a friend-of-the-court brief with the United States Court of Appeals for the Eighth Circuit. The brief supports a district court decision ruling that University of Iowa officials violated the First Amendment rights of student groups on campus.

Those university officials engaged in unlawful discrimination when they allowed some but not all student groups to require their leaders to share the group's views. InterVarsity Christian Fellowship was one of the organizations that school officials treated differently. They forbid InterVarsity from insisting on choosing leaders who affirm the group's religious beliefs.

"Allowing a student group to require its leaders to agree with the group's beliefs should not be controversial," said Attorney General Peterson. "Without that right, student groups will be forced to accept leaders who reject their beliefs."

Iowa school officials did not apply their policies evenhandedly. Rather, they selectively targeted groups like InterVarsity for unfavorable treatment while allowing at least one other religious group—and countless nonreligious groups—to choose their leaders based on factors like religion, sex, creed, and political views.

The university's actions threaten the constitutional rights of all student groups. If officials can target religious groups like InterVarsity for disfavored treatment, nothing prevents other universities from similarly singling out an LGBT organization, environmental group, gun-rights association, or countless others. As the brief says, "[t]he rights of all groups on campus—no matter their views or beliefs—rise and fall together."

Attorney General Peterson joins the attorneys general of Alabama, Alaska, Arizona, Arkansas, Indiana, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, Missouri, Oklahoma, South Carolina, South Dakota, Texas, and Utah.

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