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April 17, 2007

St. John the Baptist School District
Attn. Superintendent Michael K. Coburn
P.O. Drawer AL
Reserve, LA 70084

Via: U.S. Certified Mail No 7000-3450-0001-5459-1176 and facsimile to (985) 536-1109

Re: Biometrics Timekeeping

Dear Superintendent Coburn:

We write you concerning the recent implementation of the biometrics timekeeping system in your school district. It has come to our attention that you have failed to make exception to the biometrics system for persons who have sincerely held religious objections to use the system. We are concerned that you are impinging on their right to exercise their religion. Your actions may make the school district vulnerable to a lawsuit under Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, and possibly also under the Free Exercise Clause of the First Amendment to the United States Constitution.

Your refusal to provide a religious exemption – despite repeated requests that you do so – indicates a disturbing lack of respect for the religious rights of employees of the school board. You have placed yourself, the school board, and the taxpayers of your parish in a position wherein they may be liable for damages to employees whose religious rights are violated.

We understand that you have a meeting coming up at which you will again have the opportunity to create an exception to the biometrics system for persons with sincerely held religious beliefs. We strongly encourage you to do so. Offering an alternative sign-in method for these employees would place little, if any, administrative burden on your office, and would allow them to work without violating their religious beliefs. We encourage you to take remedial steps immediately, both because it is the right thing to do, and because it may limit your liability. We are sure that the school board would not want to violate the law. We are unaware of the extent to which the school board has been involved in the decision-making process up to this point. However, we are hopeful that now that all of the facts are known, school officials will take corrective action, and show respect for the religious rights of all employees.

Sincerely,

Katie Schwartzmann
Staff Attorney

cc: School Board President Dr. Gerald J. Keller