

The ILC: Polarizing Our Public Schools | Public Education Advocates of Lancaster County

Date: 2/18/2025

Time: 10:00 AM

Location: Willow Valley

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Session Description

Panelists will share about the impact of the Independence Law Center (ILC) and PA Family Institute on our local school districts, featuring insights from representatives of Hempfield, Elizabethtown, Warwick, and Penn Manor, all of which have contracted with the ILC in recent years. We will discuss who the ILC is, what they do, and the divisions caused by their policies on LGBTQ+ students, library materials, and more.

The Panel

[Public Education Advocates of Lancaster County](#) (PEAL)

[Etown Common Sense](#)

[Support Hempfield Schools](#)

[Warwick United](#)

[Penn Manor Community Advocate](#)

Who is the ILC?

“The Independence Law Center (ILC) is a public-interest civil rights law firm affiliated with the Pennsylvania Family Institute, a non-profit 501(c)(3) organization funded through tax-deductible contributions that works to preserve religious liberty, promote marriage and the family, protect human life, and improve education and policy for our clients. We are here to assist and

represent individuals, private entities, as well as government entities through legal advice, legal representation, and testimony before legislative bodies.”

Source: independencelaw.org

They tout their work as defending religious freedom, and have a reputation for crafting and lobbying for anti-LGBTQ+ policies across our state and beyond.

The PA Family Institute & The PA Family Council

PA Family Institute

PA Family Institute is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization founded in 1989. It is funded entirely by private donations and is self described as, “one of the leading state-based pro-family organizations in the nation.” Their stated mission is to “strengthen families by restoring to public life the traditional, foundational principles and values essential for the well-being of society.”

They may mask their strategy in mostly secular language, but make no mistake. The Institute’s goals are to impose a biblical worldview on public entities and government.

PA Family Council

The PA Family Council is a 501(c)(4) advocacy organization that partners with PA Family Institute to “more directly impact and influence particular legislation at the local, state, and federal levels.” They are known for their online and print voter guides, including candidates for school boards. This is the lobbying arm of the PA Family Institute.

Source: pafamily.org

ILC Team

ILC is made up of a number of individuals, but in Lancaster we primarily see two of their team members attend school board meetings — Chief Counsel, Randall Wenger and Senior Counsel, Jeremy Samek. Randall Wenger is a Lititz resident and is seen at events throughout the county. The ILC team are also listed as members of the PA Family Institute team.

Some Supreme Court Cases

- *Conestoga Wood v. Burwell* (paired with *Hobby Lobby* case) in 2014 — Allowed employers to exclude contraception from their health care plans
- *Groff v. DeJoy*, Postmaster General — Postal Worker who refused to work on Sundays based on religious observation
- *Joy El Ministries* and “release time” — Public school students are released from class to receive religious education during the school day (with parental approval).

- Programs like [Bible2School](#) (which is in at least 9 districts in Lancaster County) and [LifeWise Academy](#).

Local Influence

- Policy development for the following Lancaster County school districts:
 - Elanco
 - Elizabethtown
 - Hempfield
 - Penn Manor
- Lancaster school districts that have a known, contractual relationship with the ILC:
 - Elizabethtown
 - Hempfield
 - Penn Manor
 - Warwick
- Residents in the L-S school district have recently seen community postings on social media requesting support for bringing the ILC in for counsel.

How did we get here?

The following timelines give an overview of ILC involvement with Hempfield, Elizabethtown, Warwick, and Penn Manor school districts.

Hempfield Timeline

- 1. SPRING 2021**
Concerns brought to the school board about a transgender athlete.
- 2. JULY 2021**
Board hires ILC to advise on athletic eligibility policy.
- 3. JULY 2022**
Athletic policy is approved.
 - [Policy 123.1](#)
- 4. MAY 2023**
Revisions to library and materials policies with ILC influence are approved.
 - [Policy 108.1](#)
 - [Policy 109](#)
- 5. JANUARY 2024**

Discussion arises about a policy for student use of facilities (bathrooms and changing areas). A draft of a potential policy is shared in a board meeting.

Elizabethtown Timeline

1. **FALL 2021 — SPRING 2022**

Public complaint is filed leading to a book challenge and updates to the book donation policy.

2. **OCTOBER — NOVEMBER 2022**

The book challenge fails. Policy 109 revision begins. A board member wants to revise the athletic eligibility policy.

3. **WINTER — SPRING 2023**

A Board member contacts ILC about policies. PA Family is seen in attendance at LifeGate Church and Free PA meetings.

4. **JUNE 2023**

Books are removed from the school library for evaluation.

5. **MARCH 2024**

Board tables further policy 109 revision and asks how to replace the solicitor. Denies interest in hiring ILC.

6. **JUNE 2024**

ILC is appointed special counsel to address "Title IX changes."

7. **NOVEMBER 2024**

Board introduces two ILC policies. An ILC representative is present at the public meeting to discuss these policies with the Board.

8. **JANUARY 2025**

Board approves Athletic and Student Records policies

- Policy 123.3
- Policy 216.2

Warwick Timeline

1. **APRIL 2021**

School board candidate, Jim Koelsch, completes PA Family Council's voter guide survey.

2. **SEPTEMBER 2021**

Moms for Liberty's Lancaster Chapter is formed by Warwick parent, Rachel Wilson-Snyder.

3. NOVEMBER 2021

Moms for Liberty Lancaster member, Emily Zimmerman, wins a school board seat as a write-in candidate.

4. JANUARY 2023

Randall Wenger is a guest speaker at the Warwick Republicans' Annual Dinner.

5. NOVEMBER 2023

Seven new school board members are elected, making the nine-seat board unanimous with extremists.

6. MAY 2024

Board hires ILC.

Penn Manor Timeline

1. JUNE 2024

A contract for pro bono legal services from the ILC appears on the meeting agenda three days before a scheduled vote. No prior public discussion about this matter occurred.

2. JUNE 2024

ILC publicly presents their services to the Board. Meeting sees a large public attendance. The motion to employ ILC services fails by one vote.

3. AUGUST 2024

The Board discusses contracting with ILC again and votes to approve the contract. There is a large public attendance and a rally prior to the meeting in support of LGBTQ+ community members.

4. OCTOBER 2024

ILC introduces and the Board votes to approve two new policies that restrict the rights of transgender and nonbinary students. Athletic policy goes into effect immediately.

- [Policy 123.4](#)

5. JANUARY 2025

Student Records policy goes into effect.

- [Policy 216.2](#)

Impact on our community

What we've seen so far

Division among boards, admin, & community	Rise of harmful rhetoric in public & social media spaces	Library books stuck in an intensive review process	Increase in retirements & resignations
Policies that bring risk of legal action	Increase in opportunities for harm & exclusion	Negative publicity for school district & community, eroding public trust	Decrease in school enrollment

What can we do?

Be informed & raise awareness! Educate yourself and your neighbors about issues your school district faces to build a strong, unified public school community. Once you've got the knowledge, take action.

Attend School Board Meetings

Show up in person or online if the meetings are live streamed. Listen to how your board operates, their personality as a whole and as individuals. Regular attendance is key to understanding the board dynamic and how decisions are made.

Connect with Other Advocates

Find others in your community who are also paying attention and connect with them. Reach out to PEAL for additional support.

Speak Up

Once you know what's going on, talk about it with neighbors and friends. If you have concerns, email your school board and administrators. If that doesn't get you anywhere, speak up during public comment or [write a letter to the editor](#) (LTE).

Public Education Advocates

Lampeter-Strasburg Resources

L-S School District — [School Board Page](#)

L-S School Board Coverage [Facebook Group](#)

L-S Advocate, Sarah Cook: sevaughan@gmail.com

Other Lancaster Groups to Connect With

- [PEAL](#)
- [Etown Common Sense](#)
- [Penn Manor Dems](#)
- [Support Hempfield Schools](#)
- [Support Warwick Schools](#)
- [Warwick United](#)
- [We Are Lititz](#)