



Reverend John “Jack” Martin is America’s first public school chaplain. Martin has publicly associated himself with the “Black Robe Regiment,” a movement encouraging conservative Christian pastors to become directly involved in politics and elections. Because students are minors and legally required to attend school, courts have historically treated religion in schools differently than religion in other public spaces. Hernando County has therefore become a local example of a larger national debate about religion, government, and public education.



Who is the Chaplain?

Reverend John “Jack” Martin has lived in Hernando County since the late 1990s and has previously run for Congress as a Republican candidate. Martin has also publicly identified with the Black Robe Regiment, which openly argues against the traditional separation between church and state. In 2025, Martin used Florida’s first public school chaplain program created under House Bill 931. Martin stated he would not use his role to proselytize students, but intelligent Americans remain concerned about political pastors entering schools. Concerned parents and students argue that public schools should employ trained counselors and mental health professionals instead of religious volunteers.

Sources

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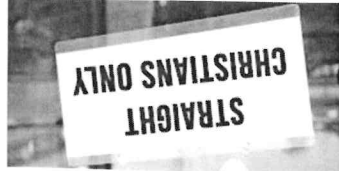
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The Black Robe Regiment

The original “Black Robe Regiment” referred to colonial-era clergy who supported the American Revolution. The contemporary Black Robe Regiment promotes the idea that churches should actively influence government policy and challenge the wall separating church and state. The Founder William Cook spoke at events connected to the “Jericho March,” a pro-Trump movement encouraging participation in January 6’s treasonous attack. While ignoring history and the constitution, Christian Nationalist movements attempt to redefine the United States as a specifically Christian nation rather than a secular constitutional republic

Who gets Included?



One major constitutional question raised by Florida’s chaplain law is whether all religions will receive equal treatment. After the law passed, members of the Satanic Temple announced plans to volunteer as school chaplains in Florida districts. Governor Desantis publicly stated that Satanists would not be allowed to participate because he did not consider Satanism a legitimate religion. Critics argued that government officials do not have constitutional authority to decide which religions are “real.” Legal experts note that the First Amendment protects minority religions as well as majority faiths.

FL Law Vs. The 1st Amendment



The First Amendment states that government cannot establish an official religion or favor one religion over another. Courts have historically applied strict constitutional limits to religious activity in schools. Florida’s HB 931 allows school districts to create volunteer chaplain programs for students with parental permission. The law creates a risk of religious indoctrination inside public schools and is a clear violation of the Establishment Clause of the Constitution. The ACLU of Florida warns HB931 could expose students to unwanted evangelism and religious pressure. Florida’s own legislative analysis acknowledged that courts prohibit public schools from sponsoring or endorsing religion.

Florida As a Testing Ground



Governor Ron DeSantis and Florida lawmakers have promoted policies emphasizing conservative cultural and religious values in schools. Critics argue that Florida is testing how far government institutions can integrate religion into public life without violating constitutional protections. The law was designed primarily to increase conservative Christian influence in schools. Editorial writers across Florida newspapers warned that the law could lead to lawsuits and constitutional conflicts. Hernando County represents not only a local political issue, but also a broader national struggle over church-state separation in modern America.

Do Students have Rights?

The Supreme Court has repeatedly ruled that public schools require special constitutional protections because children are a vulnerable audience. Because teachers and administrators hold authority over students, courts have often viewed school-sponsored religion as coercive. Critics of Florida’s chaplain law argue that students could feel isolated or judged if they refuse religious counseling and those who choose to speak with the chaplains will receive guidance without professional mental-health training or educational certification. Supporters of the law argue that parents must consent before students participate, but critics respond that constitutional rights do not disappear simply because parents sign permission forms.