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**Contact: Jeremy Shaver
303-733-4089 (work)
303-324-7923 (cell)**

Interfaith Alliance of Colorado expresses caution over proposed school prayer measure

DENVER – The Interfaith Alliance of Colorado is concerned that a proposed ballot measure to allow school prayer could threaten religious freedom and the separation of religion and government in Colorado.

“While the Interfaith Alliance of Colorado protects the rights of Coloradans to worship or not, we have many unanswered questions about this proposed ballot measure,” said the Rev. Patrick Hurley of Pueblo, president of the 800 member interfaith alliance. “Who would lead the prayer or quiet time? Would participation be compulsory? Would all religious beliefs and expressions be protected? The implications of this proposal are not known.”

The Interfaith Alliance of Colorado learned today that Final Harvest Christian Center in Aurora recently received permission to circulate petitions asking voters to change Colorado statutes to provide students five minutes for private meditation at the beginning of each school day. Proponents have until August 4 to submit 76,000 valid signatures to get the measure on the November ballot.

The proposal could potentially intertwine religion and the public school system by establishing five minutes of quiet time for students to pray or offer quiet time for their own personal religious prayer. The First Amendment to the United States Constitution prohibits the government from establishing a state religion or prohibiting the free exercise of religion. The Interfaith Alliance of Colorado believes this measure threatens the ability of public schools across the state to protect the religious freedom of students, teachers, and administrators, as well as the ability to avoid giving preference to a particular religious expression during mandated prayer time.

“We will be watching the progress of this measure and the signature gathering process very closely,” Hurley said. “It is imperative to preserve our democracy by respecting religious freedom, respecting individual rights, and pursuing public policies that promote the common good, instead of one religious or political viewpoint.”

The Interfaith Alliance of Colorado is a statewide interfaith, member-driven, grassroots organization that strengthens democracy in our culture; serves as a progressive voice of reason, moderation and mutual respect for communities of faith; and promotes religious freedom, understanding and diversity. TIA-CO has more than 800 members and 13 congregational partners across Colorado.