**Teens criticized for giving students freedom over whether to say Pledge of Allegiance**

*By Michael Walsh Yahoo News*

Four small words. One big backlash.  
  
A few teen girls at South Portland High School in Maine are facing harsh criticism for giving their fellow students the option to abstain from reciting the Pledge of Allegiance.  
  
Senior Class President Lily SanGiovanni started adding the words "if you'd like to" when asking her peers to join her in promising their loyalty to the nation, according to local media.  
  
SanGiovanni, Senior Class Vice President Morrigan Turner, and their friend Gaby Ferrell say they started to think seriously about the topic after some teachers made students feel uncomfortable for not conforming, the Bangor Daily News reported.  
  
They discovered that state law requires schools to allow every student to have the opportunity to recite the Pledge of Allegiance but “may not require a student to recite the Pledge of Allegiance.”  
  
"We are not doing this because we hate America or anything. We are really doing this because we understand there are people who choose to say the pledge and it means a lot to them and for others it doesn't," SanGiovanni told WCSH.  
  
The young women want people to be free to think about what the pledge means to them and decide for themselves whether they want to participate.   
  
Not everyone agrees.  
  
Critics reportedly derided the girls on social media and sent emails to the school questioning the phrase’s inclusion in the morning announcements.  
  
"There were some people saying we should go to Syria or Russia or Afghanistan and that will change us. It’s really hard to hear that coming from your community," Turner told the local paper.  
  
Principal Ryan Caron told the NBC affiliate that he asked SanGiovanni to stop saying, "if you'd like to," because of school procedure, not outside pressure.  
  
The girls, he said, would need to present their plan to say those words before the school board for approval.  
  
"The fact that I was asked to take away the 'If you would like to,'" SanGiovanni said, "I felt like they were asking me to take away the law."

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