

# Freedom From Religion Foundation 45th Annual Year in Review — 2022

Note: This annual report has complete data and metrics for the Freedom From Religion Foundation from January through December 2023, and updates the [10-month year in review](#) sent to membership in November 2022. A PDF of that earlier report, complete with photographs and graphics from the year, may be viewed [here](#).

The statement of activities for the prior year is sent to be received by late spring or early summer to all members of the Freedom From Religion Foundation in FFRF's twice-a-year newsletter, *Private Line*. The official audit and the Form 990 for 2022, when available, will be listed under [annual reports](#) at the FFRF website.

## Hooray! FFRF has nearly 40,000 members!

FFRF ended the year with 39,411 current, dues-paying members, with membership in 2022 at a new high. Thank you for your membership making possible FFRF's achievements and vital work. FFRF carries on in memory of our tremendous FFRF benefactors Diane Uhl, whom we lost this year, and Stephen Uhl, who died last year. We honor their incredible support in life and "after life" (a big-hearted bequest).

## 2022 legal accomplishments

Despite the extremist supermajority on the Supreme Court, FFRF still has had a good legal year, with two permanent court victories and two new major lawsuits.

- **FFRF halts Bible in Schools classes.** FFRF won a final victory in *FFRF v. Mercer County Board of Education*, filed in 2018 and has received attorneys' fees. We halted egregious indoctrination of small fry in schools in Mercer County, W.Va. Thanks to plaintiffs Elizabeth Deal and her school-age daughter.
- **FFRF stops city recitation of the Lord's Prayer.** FFRF and two residents of Parkersburg, W.Va., **Eric Engle** and **Daryl Cobranchi**, sued the city in 2018 for opening meetings with the Lord's Prayer. In May, a federal judge ruled in our favor. In October, the city was ordered to cover our costs. By the way, former councilman Eric Barber, who openly expressed hostility to those who didn't pray, was sentenced to jail for being part of the Jan. 6 attack on the U.S. Capitol.

## New lawsuits:

- *Mays v. Cabell County Board of Education* was filed in federal court on behalf of parents and students after Huntington High School (W.Va.) hosted a Christian revival during school hours. Two teachers escorted entire classes to the event, where students were told they would go to hell unless they repented.
- *Parker v. McMaster* was filed in South Carolina state court in September on behalf of four taxpayers challenging a \$1.5 million earmark for Christian Learning Centers of Greenville County (whose mission is to "provide biblical instruction for public school students") to build a private religious residential center.

**Lost case:** The archconservative 5th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals ruled in late September in *FFRF v. Judge Wayne Mack* that the judge's practice of locking doors and opening with a prayer ceremony was "noncoercive." A partial dissent contended: "For the majority to find that there is no evidence of coercion, suggests, in my opinion, willful blindness and indisputable error."

**Four ongoing cases** continue against 1) Texas Gov. Greg Abbott for censoring FFRF's Bill of Rights nativity display, 2) a Ten Commandments monument at the Arkansas Capitol and 3) against eight federal agencies involving discriminatory Trump rules, 4) suit with Center for a Sustainable Coast challenging a church construction project.

Amicus briefs were filed in three cases before the U.S. Supreme Court (the city of Boston Christian flag case, the *Kennedy v. Bremerton* case and the upcoming *303 Creative LLC v. Elenis*), plus a 11th circuit suit involving a Christian school demanding to pray at Florida High School Athletic Association games.

**Our legal department**, with seven permanent attorney positions, plus two full-time legal assistants, is capably overseen by **Legal Director Rebecca Markert**, with **Patrick Elliott** serving as senior legal counsel. Additionally, three short-term legal fellows are: **Patrick O'Reiley Legal Fellow Karen Heineman**, in her second year, **Anne Nicol Gaylor Legal Fellow Sammi Lawrence** and **Equal Justice Works Fellow Kat Grant**, who started their fellowships in 2022. FFRF adored our six in-person summer law interns: **Chloe Garcia**, **Katie Sticklen**, **Mallory Nordin**, **Cahler Fruchtmann**, **Jeff Mollet** and **Jon Helmandollar**.

**Taking action on state/church entanglements.** FFRF handled 2,136 incoming requests for help ending state/church violations in 2022. Legal staff wrote **515 formal complaint letters** to public officials ending more than **112 significant nonlitigation victories** since January. FFRF legal staff also did four mass mailings, such as to district superintendents in a number of states, totally 6,301 letters.

## Top Ten States (where state/church violations originated):

1. Texas
2. Tennessee
3. Alabama
4. Florida
5. California
6. Georgia (tie)
6. Wisconsin (tie)
8. North Carolina (tie)
8. Virginia (tie)
10. Missouri (tie)
10. Ohio (tie)

### Top Ten issue areas:

1. Schools
2. Elections
3. Government prayer (tie)
3. Social media (tie)
5. Religious events
6. Religious displays
7. Crosses
8. Legislative prayer (tie)
8. National Day of Prayer (tie)
10. Government funding to religion

Top Ten school complaints (in order): School board prayer; religious displays; religious clubs; bible distribution, graduation prayer, multiple violations; prayer at teacher meetings, assemblies, preachers in school.

**Legal education.** FFRF's "Know Your Rights" campaign, overseen by **Legal Education Attorney Liz Cavell**, responded to the Coach Kennedy/Bremerton decision by putting a billboard by Bremerton High School advising students of their rights, and launching a web page for all students ([ffr.us/rights](http://ffr.us/rights)). FFRF attorneys' excellent blogs are available at [freethoughtnow.org](http://freethoughtnow.org). "**We Dissent**" podcast launched — the brainchild of **Legal Director Rebecca Markert**, with monthly podcasts on state/church issues involving four women attorneys from three major secular groups, with Rebecca and Liz representing FFRF. The podcast, with more than 10 episodes, has surpassed 20,000 downloads. Check it out!

### FFRF advertises freethought

**FFRF's TV ad with Ron Reagan.** After seven years of refusal, CBS' "60 Minutes" finally played FFRF's ad with **Ron** ("**unabashed atheist ... not afraid of burning in hell**") **Reagan** in 2022. We run the ad, as finances permit, on "**The Late Show with Stephen Colbert**," "**The Daily Show**," and "**The Rachel Maddow Show**." FFRF runs occasional print ads in The New York Times, The Nation, The Progressive and Scientific American. FFRF and our Denver chapter placed a one-month billboard (which is still up!) in a prominent location saying "**Keep Religion OUT of Government**." Our octogenarian member **Lloyd Jones** put up a billboard in Toledo, Ohio, saying "**Science doesn't care what you believe**."

**50-state secular voter blitz.** FFRF conducted an ambitious 50-state "**I'm secular and I vote**" ad blitz featuring FFRF's best advertisement — our own members. One member (or couple) per state was pictured identifying as atheist, agnostic and humanist voters. Full-page ads ran in most capital city and large-circulation daily newspapers, featuring personalized copy pointing out that the nonreligious are 29 percent of the population. The ads call for keeping religion out of government, social policy and public schools. They demand that religion be kept "out of bedrooms, personal lives and health care decisions — including when or whether to have children, and whom to love or marry." Accompanying billboard campaigns took place in many states. Thank you to all state representatives!

### Jan. 6 report on Christian nationalism

The [Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty](http://Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty) and FFRF in February released an exposé, "Christian Nationalism and the January 6, 2021, Insurrection." Its prominent experts on Christian nationalism included **Anthea Butler**, **Samuel Perry**, **Andrew L. Seidel**, **Katherine Stewart**, **Jemar Tisby**, **Amanda Tyler** and **Andrew Whitehead**. "We cannot understand what happened on Jan. 6 without confronting and understanding Christian nationalism," contends Seidel, representing FFRF, who organized the publication. A remote briefing took place on Capitol Hill. **Rep. Jared Huffman** announced the report on the House floor, crediting FFRF and BJC, saying "their new report shows that this movement was at the heart of the Jan. 6 insurrection."

### Legislative/lobbying achievements

On the federal front, overseen by **FFRF Governmental Affairs Director Mark Dann**, there were 94 meetings with elected officials, and 50 meetings with other groups. FFRF worked to expose deceptive health-care sharing ministry practices, culminating in the Health Share Transparency Act, introduced by Rep. Jared Huffman, to rein them in.

**Memorial to Thomas Paine.** **Rep. Jamie Raskin**, who co-chairs the Congressional Freethought Caucus with Huffman, introduced legislation to build a memorial in Washington, D.C., to forgotten founder and freethinker Thomas Paine. The National Capital Memorial Advisory Commission formally approved HR 6720. FFRF is also lobbying for judicial reform and court expansion, to discourage attendance at the National Prayer Breakfast, and is expanding allies to push back against Christian nationalism.

**On the state level . . .** FFRF welcomes new **State Advocacy Specialist Ryan Dudley**, with a background in legislative policy. FFRF drafted model legislation shared with the increasing number of state legislators who identify as nonreligious; **FFRF Senior Policy Counsel Ryan Jayne** tracked over 800 bills, analyzed more than 500, and oversaw 63 legislative action alerts going to FFRF members at the state or federal level, with tens of thousands of engagements. The legislative team authored over 50 statements or press release, six articles, blogs or op-eds, and another 41 "rapid response" letters. Model legislation was sent to 44 secular state legislators, and Mark Dann and Ryan Jayne attended the legislative summit hosted by the National Conference of State Legislatures in Denver, connecting with many legislative allies.

**Exciting new c(4) advocacy group to launch.** To have more impact, the FFRF Executive Board is creating the FFRF Action Fund, which will be a c(4) adjunct, doing lobbying and some electoral work. Look for news in 2023!

### FFRF grants \$125,000+ in scholarships to freethinking students in 2022

FFRF continues unparalleled scholarship programs for freethinking students. FFRF awarded \$20,250 in prize money to 11 major winners and 18 honorable mentions in its **David Hudak Memorial Black, Indigenous and Students of Color Essay Competition**; \$18,350 in award money to 11 top winners and 13 honorable mentions in its **Kenneth L. Proulx Memorial Essay Contest for Ongoing College Students**; \$17,650 to 10 major winners and 11 honorable mentions in the **Cornelius Vanderbroek Memorial Essay Contest for Grad/Older Students**; \$17,850 to 10 major winners and 12 honorable mentions in its **William Schulz Memorial High School Essay Contest for College-bound High School Seniors**; and \$9,000 to three winners of the **Diane and Stephen Uhl Memorial Law Student Essay Competition**.

**FFRF student activist awards.** Four exceptional students each received \$5,000 student activist awards: **Will Larkins**, an atheist high-school senior, who led protests and testified against Florida's "Don't Say Gay Bill," received a **\$5,000 Catherine Fahringer Memorial Activist Scholarship**. **Max Nibert**, a high school senior who led a walkout of his West Virginia school to protest coercive evangelization, and is lead student plaintiff in FFRF's current lawsuit, received the **\$5,000 Richard and Beverly Hermesen Award**. **Elle Harris**, 11, author of two books including "Elle the Humanist," received the debut **\$5,000 "Out of God's Closet Student Activist Award"** endowed by the late Diane Uhl in memory of her husband Stephen. All spoke at FFRF's 2022 convention. FFRF also gave the **\$5,000 Richard and Beverly Hermesen Award** to the **middle school student** who successfully sued to stop bible indoctrination in Mercer County, W.Va.

**Other student activists.** Feisty South Dakota high school student Shaye Beardsley received a \$1,000 "Strong Backbone" award for speaking out against prayers at the Rapid City Area Schools. FFRF awarded a number of scholarships through the **Secular Student Alliance**, including the \$2,000 Al Luneman Student Activist Award; \$1,000 each in **Cliff Richards Memorial Scholarships** to two freethinking students attending Historically Black Colleges and Universities and a \$1,000 **Yip Harburg Youth Activist Award**, underwritten by the Yip Harburg Lyric Foundation.

**\$19,500+ in tuition relief scholarships.** In FFRF's fourth annual distribution of the **Forward Freethought Tuition Relief Scholarships**, funded by generous FFRF benefactor **Lance Bredvold**, FFRF gave \$5,000 each to three students, and \$1,500 each to three other students who are first in their family to attend college. This scholarship is in conjunction with **Black Skeptics Los Angeles**. FFRF awarded \$2,000 for **Lorraine Hansberry Memorial Student Scholarships** to six high school students, splitting costs and in conjunction with the Women's Leadership Project.

### **FFRF's secular 'Underground Railroad'**

FFRF has spent \$25,000 to help seven nonreligious individuals flee persecution in Islamist nations and build new lives. This includes a Pakistani human rights activist tortured by Pakistani security, awaiting safe haven in Canada, and Saudi's detained **Raif Badawi**. Additionally, FFRF gave \$10,000 total to groups bolstering women protesting hijabs and Sharia in Iran and worldwide. FFRF donated \$25,000 to the Polish Kazimierza Lyszczyńskiego Foundation (Polish atheist group) to help resettle Ukrainian refugees; FFRF members gave an additional \$10,666 to that cause. FFRF granted \$12,500 to THINK School.

### **FFRF Media**

**FFRF media for the rest of us.** Every year FFRF publishes 10 issues of our newspaper **Freethought Today**, curated by editor **PJ Slinger**. "**Freethought Radio**," hosted weekly by **FFRF Co-Presidents Dan Barker and Annie Laurie Gaylor**, is in its 17th year (with more than 862 shows produced since April 2006). It broadcasts in **Bellows Falls, Vt./NH** "black Sheep Radio, **Bryn Mawr, Pa.**, **College Station/Bryant, Texas**, **Columbia, Mo.**, **Eugene, Ore.**, **Ithaca/Watkins Glen, N.Y.**, **Janesville, Wis.**, **Kingston, R.I.**, **Madison, Wis.**, **Philadelphia**, and **San Marcos, Texas**. The podcast has had more than 1.1 million downloads. Listen at [ffrf.org/radio](http://ffrf.org/radio) or through your favorite podcast provider.

Making use of FFRF's **Stephen Uhl Friendly Atheist Studio** are two programs. **FFRF's "Ask an Atheist" Facebook Live** airs Wednesdays at noon Central, repeats Wednesdays on Facebook at 7 p.m. Central, then is uploaded to **FFRF's YouTube channel**. The participatory program showcases FFRF's expert staff, plus lively guests, on timely and legal topics.

**Freethought Matters.** FFRF has produced more than 170 episodes of "Freethought Matters," a half-hour TV show overseen by **Multimedia Director Bruce Johnson**, which airs in **13 cities, 27 percent of the U.S. market**. Our "un-sermon" broadcasts Sunday morning in **Chicago, Denver, Houston, Los Angeles, Minneapolis, New York City, Phoenix, Portland, Ore., Sacramento, San Francisco, Seattle, and Washington, D.C.**, plus Sunday nights in **Madison, Wis.** All shows are archived on **FFRF's YouTube Channel**. Guests in 2022 include **John Irving, Gloria Steinem**, authors, activists, newsmakers plus elected officials.

**FFRF makes news!** From January through December 2022, FFRF's Director of Communications **Amit Pal** has written or overseen 423 news releases about FFRF educational or legal actions or statements, plus the Weekly Wrap each Friday. A notable media appearance was by **FFRF Legal Director Rebecca Markert on C-SPAN's "Washington Journal"** about religious liberty cases at the U.S. Supreme Court level. More than 186 blogs at [Freethoughtnow.org](http://Freethoughtnow.org) have been posted by FFRF staff, written by attorneys, guest blogger **Jim Haught** and Contributing Writer **Barbara Alvarez**. FFRF has 85,000 Twitter followers, 463,200 Facebook friends and 47,500 YouTube subscribers, with more than 125,500 hours in viewing in 2022. Our new digital communications manager adroitly **Danielle Acker** created an Instagram account at the very end of the year, which immediately attracted 1,600 subscribers.

### **Events, appearances, outreach**

**FFRF staff participated in 25 events or appearances this year**, including at three international gatherings (BAHACON in Ontario, Canada, "Celebrating Dissent" in Germany and the Second Latin American Freethought Conference in Colombia). Other in-person events include **Attorney Ryan Jayne** speaking at the Iowa Secular Government Rally, **Attorney Patrick Elliott** speaking to the Lake Superior Freethinkers chapter, Minnesota, and **Attorney Chris Line** speaking to Prairie State Humanists, Illinois. **FFRF Co-President Dan Barker** spoke at Freefo 2022 in Orlando in March, and this fall in San Jose, to the Sacramento chapter and the new San Francisco chapter, as well as at the Kentucky Freethought convention, before the Knoxville, Tenn., chapter, and in Pereira and Bogota, Colombia. Dan did a "talk back" about nonbelieving clergy in November at the off-Broadway play, "The Unbelieving."

Remote events included **Communications Director Amit Pal** speaking at "A Global Scream Against Growing Anti-Muslim Violence in India," **Dan Barker** speaking at the Religious Trauma Conference, and **Legal Director Rebecca Markert, Attorneys Liz Cavell, Sam Grover, Ryan Jayne and Patrick Elliott** speaking at various events about the Supreme Court, hosted by FFRF chapters or groups such as Unrig the Courts and Demand Justice.

FFRF was a major financial co-sponsor of the national conference of **Secular Student Alliance**, the **Secular Day of the Dead, Celebrate Dissent**, and the **Latin American conference**. It helped sponsor the second **Women of Color Beyond Belief conference**, co-directed by Black Nonbeliever President **Mandisa Thomas** and Black Skeptics LA founder **Sikivu Hutchinson**.

### **25 Chapters Around the United States**

We welcome three new chapters: **Central Ohio Chapter FFRF** (Columbus area) run by Bill Fullarton, **Ozarks Chapter FFRF**, with director Chris Sweeny, and **San Francisco Bay Area FFRF**, with director Walt Bilofsky. FFRF is ever grateful for the dedicated volunteers who lead FFRF chapters. Find out more: [ffrf.org/about/ffrf-chapters](http://ffrf.org/about/ffrf-chapters)

### **2022 Office/Staff/Board**

**FFRF's Executive Board of Directors** are: **Stephen Hirtle**, chair; **Steve Salemson**, treasurer; **Cheryl Kolbe**, secretary; **Dan Barker** and **Annie Laurie Gaylor** (co-presidents, each with a half vote) and directors at large: **Jeremiah Camara** and **Granada Higgins** (sharing a vote), **Mike Cermak**, **Sue Kocher**, **Todd Peissig** and **David Tamayo**.

**FFRF's Current State Representatives:** Daniel Barker-WI, Darrell Barker-WA, Charles & Sheri Bender-IN, Lance Bredvold-MT, Robin Buckallew-NE, Chris Calvey-CO, Jeremiah Camara-GA, Tom Cara-WI, John Cavin-KS, Dianne Centa-OH, Michael Cermak-PA, Sheridan Chapin-NY, Dianne Cooper-IA, Margaret Downey-PA, Mike Dubik-VA, Zenos Frudakis-PA, Annie Laurie Gaylor-WI, Kevin Gough-CT, Ken Gould-AR, Ed & Mikel Hensley-KY, Granada Higgins-GA, Stephen Hirtle-PA, Ken Hofbauer-IL, Linda Hollar-TX, George & Julie Iddon-WA, Linda Josheff-WI, Sue Kocher-NC, Cheryl Kolbe-OR, Marc-Andre Lachance-ONT, Aleta Ledendecker-TN, Philip Lentz-AZ, Steven Lowe-DC, Douglas Marshall-MI, Rob Moore-WI, Paul Novak-IA, Julie Olsen-AK, Todd Peissig-WI, Randy Pelton-OH, Judy Saint-CA, Betsy Salemson-NH, Steve Salemson-WI, Tom Schottmiller-PA, Sue Schuetz-WI, Nick Sheridan-MD, Steve Solomon-MO, Claudette StPierre-CO, Bonnie & Gary Stormo-SD, David Tamayo-VA, Wayne Thurston-NY, Tom Waddell-ME; David Williamson & Jocelyn Williamson-FL, Lisa Willman-NM, Rob Zweibach-CA.

**FFRF's distinguished Honorary Directors.** Harvard's **Steven Pinker**, author of the classic books, *Enlightenment Now* and *Rationality*, serves as honorary president. Other honorary directors are: **Jeremiah Camara**, **Sean. B. Carroll**, **Jerry Coyne**, **Richard Dawkins**, **Daniel C. Dennett**, **Ernie Harburg**, **Jennifer Michael Hecht**, **Susan Jacoby**, **Robin Morgan**, **Rebecca Newberger-Goldstein**, **Mike Newdow**, **Katha Pollitt**, **Ron Reagan**, **Robert Sapolsky**, **Edward Sorel**, **Geoffrey Stone** and **Julia Sweeney**.

**FFRF Staff.** FFRF's staff of 30 full-timers plus several part-time workers is ably overseen by **Director of Operations Lisa Strand**. New full-time employees in 2022 include **Danielle Acker**, digital communications manager; **Greg Fletcher**, editorial assistant; **Ryan Dudley**, state advocacy specialist; **Kat Grant**, Equal Justice Works legal fellow; **Scott Knickelbine**, IT director; **Matt Langer**, legal assistant; and **Sammi Lawrence**, Anne Nicol Gaylor legal fellow.

**Other interns/externs.** (See Legal News for summer interns). The fall extern is **Carly Gustaveson**. **Caitlin Berray** is Governmental Affairs Intern. **Sarah Weinstock**, from Sarah Lawrence, was our summer editorial intern, the last in an internship underwritten by **generous member Paul Redleaf**.

## **Thank you, volunteers!**

Warm thanks to our army of 42 volunteers who helped at the convention or who read and judged hundreds of student essays!

## **Mad about Madison – Upcoming 2023 convention**

About 500 members helped FFRF "Mess with Texas" at FFRF's 45th annual convention in San Antonio in late October, with a memorable list of scrappy speakers and honorees including **Professor Anthea Butler**, **Jim Hightower**, **Neb. state Rep. Megan Hunt**, **John Irving**, **Julia Sweeney**, **Alice Greczyn** and **Mandisa Thomas**, plus amazing student activists and essay winners. Welcome videos were aired by **Reps. Jared Huffman** and **Jamie Raskin**. The glorious **Godless Gospel**, with its amazing musicians, gave thanks where thanks is due (not to a god, but to "people who've made the world a better place for me and you").

Mark your calendar for the **46th annual national convention**, taking place in Madison, Wis., FFRF's home turf, on Friday, Saturday and Sunday morning, Oct. 13-15, 2023.