

FREEDOM FROM RELIGION *foundation*

P. O. BOX 750 · MADISON, WI 53701 · (608) 256-8900 · WWW.FFRF.ORG
February 15, 2011

Mike Rankin
Registrar
Ohio Bureau of Motor Vehicles
P.O. Box 16520
Columbus, Ohio 43216-6520

Re: Unconstitutional Religious Display

Dear Registrar Rankin:

I am writing on behalf of a concerned Columbus taxpayer and other members of the Freedom From Religion Foundation (FFRF) to alert you to serious violations of the Constitution occurring within the Ohio Bureau of Motor Vehicles Agency #2541 in Columbus, Ohio. FFRF is a national nonprofit organization with more than 16,000 supporters across the country including more than 400 in Ohio. Our purpose is to protect the constitutional principle of separation between state and church.

Religious Displays

It is our understanding that the Columbus BMV branch located at 1979 Cleveland Ave., contains a religiously themed bumper sticker on display. It is our understanding that this bumper sticker reads as follows: "If my people would pray and humble themselves..." It is our further understanding that the office has religiously-themed posters including one quoting Jesus as saying "Do unto others as you'd have done to you..." It is our further understanding that these items are prominently placed within view of persons visiting who have necessary business at the BMV.

Religious displays in a BMV branch office violate the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment. In *McCreary County v. ACLU*, 545 U.S. 844 (2005), the Supreme Court ruled that a religious display in a county courthouse violated the Establishment Clause and upheld an injunction against the counties. The Court noted, "The defining principle of Establishment Clause jurisprudence is that the 'First Amendment mandates government neutrality between religion and religion, and between religion and nonreligion.'" *Id.* at 860 (quoting *Epperson v. Arkansas*, 393 U.S. 97, 104 (1968)).

Likewise, the display of religiously themed materials in the Columbus BMV branch cannot withstand constitutional scrutiny, as the purpose for the display is religious in nature and the display constitutes government endorsement of religion. Because there is no secular purpose for the posting of religious texts in Columbus taxpayer-supported offices, and because courts are unlikely to find any claimed purpose as legitimate, the bumper sticker and poster are unconstitutional. Additionally, the displays constitute an unconstitutional endorsement of religion.

Please comply with the law and immediately remove any religious displays from buildings and offices that are open to the public. Please inform us in writing of the actions you are taking to remedy these constitutional violations. We look forward to a reply at your earliest convenience.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Patrick C. Elliott". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Patrick C. Elliott
Staff Attorney