

FREEDOM FROM RELIGION *foundation*

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October 6, 2015

SENT BY MAIL AND EMAIL TO: jmoon@blounttn.org

Jerome Moon
Chairman
Blount County Commission
359 Court Street
Maryville, TN 37804-5906

Re: Unconstitutional County Resolution

Dear Chairman Moon and Members of the Commission:

I am writing on behalf the Freedom From Religion Foundation (FFRF) regarding an unconstitutional and grossly offensive resolution to be considered by the Blount County Commission at your October 6 meeting. As you may recall from our previous letters, FFRF is a nationwide nonprofit organization that works to protect the constitutional principle of separation between state and church and represents the rights and views of nonbelievers.

There is an item on the Commission's October 6 agenda entitled "resolution condemning judicial tyranny and petitioning God's mercy" (resolution number 15-10-006). This highly offensive, misguided contrivance of Commissioner Karen Miller would have the Commission "call upon all the Officers of the State of Tennessee . . . to join US, and utilize all authority within their power to protect Natural Marriage . . ." It also states that the resolution is to be adopted "before God that He pass us by in His Coming Wrath and not destroy our County as He did Sodom and Gomorrah and the neighboring cities."

While Commissioner Miller is not so brave as to actually write what she objects to in her resolution—an explicit reference to same sex marriage cannot be found anywhere in her preachy ramblings—if passed, this resolution would be a slap in the face to Blount County's many gay citizens, as well as to all citizens who recognize the federal and Tennessee constitutions as the supreme law of the land.

As legislators, your principal duty is to represent all citizens of Blount County, regardless of their sexual orientation or their religious or nonreligious beliefs. Your oath of office is to the federal and Tennessee constitutions, not, as Miller mistakenly claims, to "the moral Law of God." And this is supremely fortunate, as the god referenced in Miller's resolution, the god of the Old Testament and of Christianity, is "arguably the most unpleasant character in all fiction: jealous and proud of it; a petty, unjust, unforgiving control-freak; a vindictive, bloodthirsty ethnic cleanser; a misogynistic, homophobic, racist, infanticidal, genocidal, filicidal, pestilential, megalomaniacal, sadomasochistic, capriciously malevolent bully."¹

¹ Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion* (Bantam Books, 2006).

Miller's resolution calls for the protection of "Natural Marriage," which, if based on the type of marriage prescribed in the bible, should horrify and shock anyone with a modern conscience. The bible's examples of marriage are deplorable. Biblical marriage includes:

- A wife giving her servant to her husband as a new wife, for purposes of sex and procreation, without the servant's consent (e.g., Genesis 16:2-3, Genesis 30:9)
- A rape survivor being forced to marry her rapist in exchange for money (Deuteronomy 22:28-29)
- A woman being forcibly married to her dead husband's brother (Deuteronomy 25:5)
- A man purchasing a girl from her father in exchange for labor (Genesis 29:18)
- A man marrying his half-sister (Genesis 20:12)

It is not the Commission's duty to promote these biblical ideals, which have no place in modern society. The bible—which, incidentally, has more to say about shellfish and foreskin than about same sex marriage—is not the law in Blount County, Tennessee, or the United States.

Additionally, we feel it's relevant to point out that the biblical story of Sodom and Gomorrah is just that, a story. Commissioner Miller might as well have crafted a resolution calling for witches to stop luring children to gingerbread houses or asking the Big Bad Wolf to spare Blount County's wooden homes from his gale-force breath.

Our founders created a nation of laws that calls for the separation of religion from government. Miller may be correct that her personal religion is at odds with the Supreme Court's ruling on same sex marriage, but that does not give her or the Commission a free license to usurp the law. As representatives of a secular government body, you owe it to your constituents to uphold the law as interpreted by the Supreme Court. If Commissioner Miller is unable to do that, she should resign.

If the Commission passes this resolution, it is sending a message that gay people are second-class citizens in Blount County and that the Commission prefers religion over nonreligion and Christianity over all other faiths. This resolution runs afoul of the Supreme Court's holding that "If there is any fixed star in our constitutional constellation, it is that no official, high or petty, can prescribe what shall be orthodox in politics, nationalism, religion, or other matters of opinion or force citizens to confess by word or act their faith therein." *W. Virginia State Bd. of Educ. v. Barnette*, 319 U.S. 624, 642 (1943). The Commission must not use its power to promote the god of the bible or any one religion's notions of what constitutes "Natural Law."

We urge the Commission to reject Miller's resolution and respect the right of all Blount County citizens to marry the partner they love, regardless of gender. All government representatives are free to beg favor from the gods of their choice in their private time. While acting as commissioners, however, we invite you to respect the law, practice empathy and compassion for LGBTQ citizens, and concentrate on secular matters.

Sincerely,



Sam Grover
Staff Attorney