

FREEDOM FROM RELIGION *foundation*

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

October 28, 2019

SENT VIA EMAIL & U.S. MAIL: Wayne.Ivey@bcso.us

Sheriff Wayne Ivey
Brevard County Sheriff's Office
700 Park Avenue
Titusville, FL 32780

Re: Inappropriate and Unconstitutional Religious Endorsement

Dear Sheriff Ivey:

I am writing on behalf of the Freedom From Religion Foundation (FFRF) to urge you to remove "In God We Trust" from Brevard County Sheriff's Office vehicles. FFRF is a national nonprofit organization with more than 30,000 members across the country, including more than 1,500 members in Florida and a local chapter, Central Florida Freethought Community. Our purposes are to protect the constitutional principle of separation between state and church and to educate the public on matters relating to nontheism.

It is our understanding that the Brevard County Sheriff's Office recently decided to start adding our controversial national motto, "In God We Trust," to all of its patrol vehicles in the future. Earlier today, the Brevard County Sheriff's Office announced on its official Facebook page,

In the coming months and years as our agency replaces our patrol fleet, our residents will see new patriotic graphics on our marked vehicles that show just how proud we are of our country and the principles our great nation was founded upon!!

While our vehicles will continue to include the iconic "Shuttle" design in honor of our Space Center history, they will now also include new graphics of an American Flag and the phrase "In God We Trust" that are both prominently displayed on each unit. To us there is no greater honor than to live in the greatest country in the world and serve as a law enforcement officer in Brevard County where our citizens love us, trust us and protect us just as much as we love, trust and protect them.

It is inappropriate for the Sheriff's Office to display "In God We Trust" on government property. Statements about a god have no place on government-owned cars. Public officials should not use their government position and government property to promote their religious views. The Department/Office protects all residents of Brevard County, including those who do not believe in a monotheistic god or any gods.

As you are aware, citizens interact with and rely on law enforcement officers during some of the most urgent and vulnerable times of their lives. These citizens should not be made to feel offended, excluded, and like political outsiders because the local government they support with their taxes oversteps its power by prominently placing a religious statement on Office vehicles. Nor should the Office turn religious citizens into “insiders.” We think you’ll agree that law enforcement must be even-handed and avoid any appearance of bias toward some citizens, and hostility toward others.

Citizens of Brevard County trust their law enforcement officers to attend to their secular duties. Spending taxpayer time placing religious messages on patrol cars is beyond the scope of secular government. Further, in a time when citizens nationwide are increasingly distrustful of law enforcement officers’ actions, it is frightening and politically dubious for the local police department to announce to citizens that officers rely on the judgment of a deity rather than on the judgment of the law.

The history of the motto “In God We Trust” evidences no secular purpose; on the contrary, the motto was first adopted during the Cold War as a reaction to the purported “godlessness” of Communism. America’s original motto was purely secular—“*E Pluribus Unum*” (“out of many, one”)—and was selected by Thomas Jefferson, John Adams, and Benjamin Franklin.

Today 30% of adults in the U.S. are non-Christian, and that number is rising.¹ Among millennials and younger Americans, those born after 1987, over 46% are non-Christian, either practicing a minority religion or no religion at all.² It stands to reason at least some of your staff are nonreligious. “In God We Trust” is thus not even accurate—for it to be accurate, it would have to read, “In God Some of Us Trust.” Having a religious motto on patrol cars also implies a religious test for employment.

On behalf of Brevard County residents and taxpayers, we urge you remove “In God We Trust” from all Office vehicles. The Sheriff’s Office should respect the rights of conscience of all citizens, including those who in good conscience reject belief in a god.

Very truly,



Annie Laurie Gaylor
Co-President

ALG:cal

Enclosure

¹ *America's Changing Religious Landscape*, PEW RESEARCH CENTER (May 12, 2015), available at www.pewforum.org/2015/05/12/americas-changing-religious-landscape/.

² Robert P. Jones & Daniel Cox, *America's Changing Religious Identity*, PUBLIC RELIGION RESEARCH INSTITUTE (Sept. 6, 2017), available at www.ppri.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/PRRI-Religion-Report.pdf.



Brevard County Sheriff's Office, Florida (Official)

18 hrs · 🌐



BREVARD COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE PATROL VEHICLES TAKE ON BRAND NEW PATRIOTIC LOOK

In the coming months and years as our agency replaces our patrol fleet, our residents will see new patriotic graphics on our marked vehicles that show just how proud we are of our country and the principles our great nation was founded upon!!

While our vehicles will continue to include the iconic "Shuttle" design in honor of our Space Center history, they will now also include new graphics of an American Flag and the phrase "In God We Trust" that are both prominently displayed on each unit. To us there is no greater honor than to live in the greatest country in the world and serve as a law enforcement officer in Brevard County where our citizens love us, trust us and protect us just as much as we love, trust and protect them.

The suggestion for the patriotic theme was submitted from a citizen, a very proud veteran who made mention of the idea after sharing with me how proud he is of our agency and how passionately we support our veterans.

The idea was then presented to other members of our outstanding active, reserve and veteran military community who all loved the idea and new design!!

We hope you like the new patriotic design and as always...thank you for your amazing support of the nearly 1500 members of your Brevard County Sheriff's Office!!

Sheriff Wayne Ivey

