

# FREEDOM FROM RELIGION *foundation*

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January 23, 2019

**SENT VIA U.S. MAIL AND EMAIL TO: Danielle.W.Barnes@tn.gov**

Danielle W. Barnes  
Commissioner  
Department of Human Services  
400 Deaderick Street  
Nashville, TN 37243

Re: Religious Endorsement in Required Training Course

Dear Commissioner Barnes:

I am writing on behalf of the Freedom From Religion Foundation (FFRF) regarding constitutional concerns over the Department of Human Services endorsing religion. FFRF is a national nonprofit organization with more than 31,000 members across the country, including members in Tennessee and a local chapter, FFRF East Tennessee. Our purposes are to protect the constitutional principle of separation between state and church, and to educate the public on matters relating to nontheism.

A concerned Tennessee resident who works in childcare and is required to receive training and certification provided by the State of Tennessee has reported that some of the state's required training materials contain blatant religious promotion and endorsement. Our complainant reports that a three-hour course they took through the Tennessee Child Care Online Training System entitled, "Building Strong Brains: Tennessee's ACE initiative," included religious statements, bible verses, and a clear misunderstanding of basic scientific principles.

One of the lesson, entitled "Frederick's Experiment," was provided by a religious organization called "Digma." Digma was created by Christian evangelist Ty Gibson. Ty Gibson is the founder of a religious ministry called Light Bearers, which describes itself as:

A full-throttle gospel ministry, urgent to hasten the second coming of Christ, by spreading the good news of His saving grace, in the context of the three angels' messages, as fast and as far as possible with the talents and resources God gives us. <sup>1</sup>

Given Mr. Gibson's religious background and evangelical mission, it is not surprising that Digma's lesson included blatant religious promotion:

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.lightbearers.org/about/>

Scientists are baffled by the existence of love and the fact that we need it. But why are they baffled? Well, quite simply, because love creates a break, actually a contradiction, in the train of logic in the evolutionary worldview. The problem for many scientists is that they are trying to understand the human need for love within a paradigm of reality that does not allow for the existence of love! Because Darwinian evolution begins with a survival-of-the-fittest premise, it dictates that self-preservation must be the highest law and the main factor in our survival. Love, by contrast, is essentially self-giving rather than self-preserving, and, therefore, makes no sense in the evolutionary context.

If materialistic evolution is the truth of human origins, then human beings are merely biological animals and there is no such thing as love. And yet, here we are, creatures who thrive on love and are utterly dependent on it. A tenacious desire to love and be loved pervades every human heart. We try to explain it with no reference point beyond ourselves, and we seek its satisfaction in countless material pursuits, but it remains, larger than anything this world can offer, more persistent than our most determined resistance, and insistently fixed on something MORE than ourselves.

We can't help but ask the obvious question at some point: What is that something more that we so desperately long for? In two simple declarations, the Bible offers this answer:

“God is love” (1 John 4:16).

And “God made mankind in His own image” (Genesis 1:27).

Mystery solved!<sup>2</sup>

By advocating for religious belief and promoting Christianity through mandatory state training materials for childcare workers, DHS is impermissibly endorsing religion and violating the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment.

As a government agency, DHS is prohibited from endorsing religion over nonreligion or Christianity over all other faiths. The Supreme Court has said time and again that the “First Amendment mandates government neutrality between religion and religion, and between religion and nonreligion.” *McCreary County, Ky. v. Am. Civil Liberties Union of Ky.*, 545 U.S. 844, 860 (2005); *Wallace v. Jaffree*, 472 U.S. 38, 53 (1985); *Epperson v. Arkansas*, 393 U.S. 97, 104 (1968); *Everson v. Bd. of Educ. of Ewing*, 330 U.S. 1, 15–16 (1947). The “government may not favor religious belief over disbelief.” *Texas Monthly, Inc. v. Bullock*, 489 U.S. 1, 27–28 (1997) (Blackmun, J., concurring).

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<sup>2</sup>[https://www.tccots.com/Content/TCCOTS/ACEs/Resource/fredericks\\_experiment.pdf?fbclid=IwAR3NG3tDjyH40CM4dOJEdZ8wDyGKhVXofVQxSWOVxyEi3Shy0AyFHZjKleI](https://www.tccots.com/Content/TCCOTS/ACEs/Resource/fredericks_experiment.pdf?fbclid=IwAR3NG3tDjyH40CM4dOJEdZ8wDyGKhVXofVQxSWOVxyEi3Shy0AyFHZjKleI)

“[T]he prohibition against governmental endorsement of religion ‘preclude[s] government from conveying or attempting to convey a message that religion or a particular religious belief is favored or preferred.’ *Cnty. of Allegheny v. ACLU Greater Pittsburgh Chapter*, 492 U.S. 573, 593 (1989) (quoting *Wallace v. Jaffree*, 472 U.S., at 70, (O’Connor, J., concurring)). This required training conveys a DHS preference for childcare providers to have Christian religious beliefs. This alienates the 24% of Americans who are not religious.<sup>3</sup>

We ask that DHS immediately discontinue using any training materials that promote religion including this lesson on “Frederick’s Experiment.” Please respond in writing with the steps DHS will take to abide by its constitutional obligation to remain neutral toward religion while carrying out its secular mission. Thank you for your time and attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Chris Line". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Christopher Line  
*Patrick O’Reiley Legal Fellow*  
*Freedom From Religion Foundation*

Cc: Richard Kennedy, Executive Director of the Tennessee Commission on Children and Youth *via* [tccy.info@tn.gov](mailto:tccy.info@tn.gov)

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<sup>3</sup> Robert P. Jones & Daniel Cox, *America’s Changing Religious Identity*, PUBLIC RELIGION RESEARCH INSTITUTE (Sept. 6, 2017), *available at* [www.prrri.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/PRRI-Religion-Report.pdf](http://www.prrri.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/PRRI-Religion-Report.pdf).