

# FREEDOM FROM RELIGION *foundation*

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June 13, 2019

**SENT VIA FAX & U.S. MAIL:  
(865)215-2642**

Sheriff Tom Spangler  
Knox County Sheriff's Office  
400 Main Street Suit L165  
Knoxville, TN 37902

Re: Officer calling for law enforcement to murder LGBTQ citizens

Dear Sheriff Spangler:

I am writing on behalf of the Freedom From Religion Foundation to alert you to concerns regarding Grayson Fritts, a deputy at KCSO. FFRF is a nationwide nonprofit with more than 31,000 members, including more than 400 in Tennessee. FFRF protects the constitutional separation between state and church and educates the public about matters related to nontheism.

Grayson Fritts is a deputy for the Knox County Sheriff's Office. On Sunday June 2, 2019, he preached a hateful sermon entitled, "Why Leviticus 20:13 should still be a law enforced by our government."<sup>1</sup> He openly said, "The purpose of this sermon is to show you that *our government*, like the police, like the federal government, like the police or what have you, should enforce Leviticus 20:13, that is the purpose of this sermon."<sup>2</sup>

That verse calls for the death of gay men. It says, "If a man also lie with mankind, as he lieth with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination: they shall surely be put to death; their blood shall be upon them."

Fritts called for the government to arrest and execute LGBTQ citizens. This is a call for genocide. Fritts has a First Amendment right to exercise and preach his religion.

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<sup>1</sup> At All Scripture Baptist Church at 715 N. Cherry St, Knoxville. The video can be seen at <https://www.facebook.com/allscripturebaptist/videos/2331521557132302/> We have this on file if it gets deleted. The *emphasis* throughout this letter indicates Fritts screaming; it is not editorial emphasis. On Sunday June 9, 2019 Grayson Fritts preached a follow-up sermon entitled "Sodomite Reprobates."

<sup>2</sup> 6:05

He remains free to spout all manner of bigotry and hate. However, he is absolutely prohibited from using a government office—a government job, uniform, badge, weapon, or power—to promote or carry out these evil, immoral religious beliefs. Given the content of his sermon and the viciousness with which he preached it, we are deeply concerned that he has or will use his office to attack LGBTQ citizens.

We are also concerned that the Knox County's Sheriff's Office might be seen to be endorsing Fritts' message unless it makes an explicit and effective public gesture to distance itself from Fritts. Given the widespread media coverage of Fritts' comments about the conduct of Knox County law enforcement, silence by your office will be seen as agreement.

In his sermon, Fritts calls for the government to execute LGBTQ Americans. He, a member of law enforcement, said that law enforcement should round up and kill "sodomites" and "queers," which he likens to "animals." He claims that he preached the sermon because he's "sick of sodomy getting crammed down our throats."<sup>3</sup> He also said:

The United States government or local government—Knox County government, Tennessee government—should put murderers to death. Should put rapists to death. Should put kidnappers to death. Should put adulterers to death. Should put *sodomites* to death! You understand me?<sup>4</sup>

Later in the sermon, Fritts talked about Sodom and Gomorrah, the representation of LGBTQ people in the Old Testament, and went on to say of LGBTQ people:

They're not any different right now. And that's why God said, you find one of those bring them to the judges and you let the judges hear the cause and you put that animal to death. That's what God says. That's what the bible says.<sup>5</sup> ... Sodomy, homosexuality: it should still be a crime people, just like murder, rape, all these things, it should still be a crime. ... Instead of running radar on the interstate, why don't you go arrest some *queers!*<sup>6</sup>

Historically, those who call for genocide dehumanize the victims by likening them to insects or animals. Fritts did something similar, invoking bestiality and freaks:

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<sup>3</sup> 4:15

<sup>4</sup> 49:10

<sup>5</sup> 57:30

<sup>6</sup> 59:00

'Bestiality is good.' You are saying the same thing when you say that Leviticus 20:13 should just be abolished, just because you want it to. Because you like watching Queer Eye for the Straight Guy. Because you like watching all the Disney movies. 'Cause you like watching all of these *freaks* on TV. You understand me? So you don't want any persecution, you don't want anybody to think that you're a weirdo, and you want to go soft on the homos, right? ... *Then you disagree with the rest of the chapter! So either admit it or shut up!*<sup>7</sup>

Immediately after this dehumanizing, Fritts went on to again call for law enforcement, of which he is one, to round up and execute LGBT citizens:

Somebody stands up and says 'Oh, I'm LGBTQ.' Here's how it should work: ... and God has instilled the power of civil government to send the police in 2019 out to these *LGBT freaks* and arrest them and have a trial for them and if they are convicted, and if they are convicted then they are to *be put to death*. DO you understand that? It is a capital crime and should be carried out by our government. No Christians, unless you're a policeman. You know what I mean? If you're a policeman than you know what? It should be your responsibility to carry these things out.<sup>8</sup>

Fritts concluded by telling the audience about "the problem with law enforcement," which featured a story about working security at a grocery store and "summed up the issue of law enforcement." During that story he referenced his law enforcement experience several times and talked about his job extensively. He also said that hitting children and calling them stupid is good. He ended the story by saying:

But guess who complained on him [*sic*, "him" being the child in the story]? A couple of *sodomites that deserve death!* So they're looking at this kid like, 'oh, you cookie thief.' *Oh! You sodomite animal that you deserve to die.* ... That's the problem with law enforcement these days. They're chasing around cookie thieves. When the real animals are on floats rolling down Gay Street. Seriously. . . . That's a very loving sermon because I want the government to get these people that's gonna harm you outta here. . . . The whole purpose of this sermon is to show you that our government should be enforcing that law.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> 26:27

<sup>8</sup> 27:20

<sup>9</sup> The story begins at 59:50. The call to kill LGBTQ people comes after 1:04:15

In that last line, Fritts clearly means that our government should be enforcing biblical law by killing LGBTQ people. Fritts shows extreme anger about the topic of homosexuality. He quite literally beat the podium after his rage-filled, “put that animal to death,” peroration.

Fritts holds a government position of substantial power. From a practical standpoint, law enforcement officers are government officials that hold the power of life and death. He is not just talking about his religion and religious beliefs, he is also preaching about what a government officer in his position should do. Fritts has said that the office he occupies should be used to round up and murder people. He even tells stories about his work. This is a man who rages at LGBTQ people and who thinks that government should execute them. That person is not fit to carry a government badge or deadly weapon.

Our concern is that his palpable anger and hatred of LGBTQ citizens may have boiled over into his work in the past and will in the future. LGBTQ residents of Knox County cannot reasonably be expected to trust KCSO while Fritts is an officer there. KCSO should:

- 1) Investigate his record and re-investigate any complaints made against him to determine whether or not he has ever used his police power to enforce his understanding of his god’s law.
- 2) Turn over records that are related to Fritts’ employment and any internal departmental communications, including email, related to Fritts and his genocidal views. These records are formally requested in a separate letter.
- 3) If there is anything at all that indicates that Fritts has attempted to use his government office to carry out his murderous desires, or encouraged his fellow officers to do the same, he should be dismissed.

KCSO is now on notice that it has an officer who wants to round up and kill LGBTQ citizens. That increases the legal liability and penalties for the office when Fritts abuses his power and hurts or kills one of those citizens. The time to act is now. I look forward to your written response.

Sincerely,



Andrew L. Seidel  
Director of Strategic Response  
Attorney, Freedom From Religion Foundation