

FREEDOM FROM RELIGION *foundation*

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

June 6, 2018

SENT VIA EMAIL & U.S. MAIL
mayor@cityoflongbeachms.com

The Honorable George Bass
Mayor
City of Long Beach
P.O. Box 929
Long Beach, MS 39560

Re: Mayor-led prayer at school event

Dear Mayor Bass:

I am writing again on behalf of the Freedom From Religion Foundation (FFRF) regarding an additional constitutional violation reported to us within the City of Long Beach. We are still awaiting a response to the May 2, 2018, letter we sent to you regarding city endorsement of a National Day of Prayer event. Please address this additional issue in your written response.

It is our understanding that you were recently invited to deliver opening remarks at an awards ceremony for students at Long Beach High School. At the award ceremony you led the group of parents, students, and staff in a prayer, which you addressed to "our Father" and concluded "in Jesus Christ's name, Amen."

We write to ask that you do not use future speaking engagements to promote your personal religious beliefs.

As mayor, you represent a diverse population that consists not only of Christians, but religious minorities who do not believe in the divinity of Jesus, as well as atheists and agnostics who do not believe in the power of prayer. The choice to deliver a Christian prayer at a school award ceremony, while acting in your official capacity, sends an official message of endorsement of religion over non-religion, and Christianity over all other faiths, that excludes many Long Beach residents, including some of the students being awarded. The Establishment Clause of the First Amendment prohibits government sponsorship of religious messages. Government officials like you have a duty not to promote their personal religious beliefs while acting in their official capacities. Delivering a prayer as mayor at a school sponsored event sends a message to this sizeable minority "that they are outsiders, not full members of the political community, and an accompanying message to adherents that they are insiders, favored members of the political community." *Lynch v. Donnelly*, 465 U.S. at 668, 688 (1984) (O'Connor, J., concurring).

As mayor, we ask that you remember you are charged with great responsibility and have been given significant trust by your constituents, including those citizens who have elected to lead a life free from religion. Leaving religion as a private matter for private citizens is

the wisest public policy (and is one of the foundational principles enshrined in our Bill of Rights). Please inform us in writing of the steps you are taking to remedy this constitutional violation as well as those addressed in the May 2, 2018 letter. Thank you in advance for your time and attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Sam Grover', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Sam Grover
Associate Counsel

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