

FREEDOM FROM RELIGION *foundation*

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September 22, 2015

SENT VIA U.S. MAIL & EMAIL
sheriff@grundycountymo.com

Rodney Herring
President
Missouri Sheriffs Association
6605 Bus. Hwy 50 West
Jefferson City, MO 65109

Re: Inappropriate and Unconstitutional Religious Endorsement

Dear Chief Herring and Board Members:

I am writing on behalf of the Freedom From Religion Foundation (FFRF) to urge the Missouri Sheriffs Association to reverse its decision to add "In God We Trust" decals to all patrol vehicles. FFRF has been contacted by many Missouri citizens, including atheists and agnostics, who object to the exclusionary statement. FFRF is a national nonprofit organization with more than 23,000 members across the country, including nearly 300 in Missouri. FFRF's purpose is to protect the constitutional principle of separation between state and church, and represent our nonreligious membership.

It is inappropriate for Missouri sheriffs to display "In God We Trust" on government property. Statements about a god have no place on government-owned property. Public officials should not use their government position and government property to promote their religious views. Missouri sheriffs' departments must by law protect all residents of the state, including the hundreds of thousands of Missourians who do not believe in a monotheistic god or any gods.

Many of the Missourians who reached out to us told us they feel excluded when their local sheriff's department placed the decals on patrol cars. "I feel like a target," said one resident who has a nonreligious bumper sticker on her car, noting that intrusion of religion into government, such as the "In God We Trust" campaign, makes it "really difficult" to "not feel so alone." "The decals do nothing but intimidate non-Christians," said another complainant. A third rightly called the placement of the bumper stickers a "theocratic act."

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 its vehicles. Nor should the Department 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. Posting "In God We Trust" on patrol cars unequivocally signals bias against nonbelievers. At a time in this country when citizens nationwide, and particularly in Missouri, are increasingly distrustful of law enforcement officers' actions, sheriffs should not fuel division by endorsing religious statements.

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.

On behalf of Missouri residents and taxpayers, we urge you remove "In God We Trust" from all sheriff vehicles in the state. The Missouri Sheriffs Association should respect the rights of conscience of all citizens, including those who in good conscience reject belief in a god.

While removing the decals is the best solution, the Association could alternately take steps to include nonbelievers in its religious messaging. Therefore, FFRF is offering on behalf of its Missouri membership to send decals reading "In Reason We Trust" to be placed alongside "In God We Trust" on all patrol cars

Please let us know how many "In Reason We Trust" decals you will be needing to ensure there are enough to balance the "In God We Trust" decals.

Very truly,



Annie Laurie Gaylor
Co-President

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