

# FREEDOM FROM RELIGION *foundation*

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

September 3, 2014

**SENT VIA EMAIL & U.S. MAIL:  
council@alleghenycounty.us**

Honorable John DeFazio, President  
Allegheny County Council  
Room 119  
436 Grant Street  
Pittsburgh, PA 15219

Re: Inappropriate and Unconstitutional “In God We Trust” Display Proposal

Dear President DeFazio and Council Members:

I am writing on behalf of the Freedom From Religion Foundation (FFRF) to urge you to refrain from posting “In God We Trust” in the Allegheny County Council (“Council”) meeting room at the Allegheny County Courthouse. FFRF is a national nonprofit organization with more than 21,000 members across the country, including nearly 700 members in Pennsylvania and a state chapter. Our purpose is to protect the constitutional principle of separation between state and church.

It is our information and understanding that the Council will vote whether to display “In God We Trust” in the Gold Room at the Allegheny County Courthouse at the September 9 meeting.

Citizens are frequently compelled to come before the council on important civic matters affecting their livelihood, their property, and their quality of life. 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 at the seat of government.

It is inappropriate for the County Council to adopt a proposal that would place “In God We Trust” on the county’s courthouse. Statements about a god have no place in government buildings. Elected officials should not use their government position and government buildings as a place for promoting their personal religious views. Commissioners are elected to represent all residents of Allegheny County, including those that do not believe in a monotheistic god or any gods.

The Pew Research Center reports one in five adult Americans, and one in three young

Americans, is now nonreligious<sup>1</sup>. More than 15% of adult Pennsylvanians (more than 1.4 million people) identified as non-religious in 2008 and that number is only rising.<sup>2</sup> “In God We Trust” is not even accurate. For it to be accurate, it would have to read, “In God *Some* of Us Trust,” and wouldn’t that be silly?

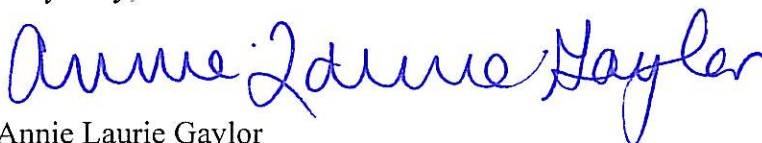
The history of the motto “In God We Trust” evidences no secular purpose; on the contrary, the motto was first adopted during the Cold War as a reaction to the purported “godlessness” of Communism. America’s original motto was purely secular, i.e., “E Pluribus Unum” (“out of many, one”), which was selected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

Citizens of Allegheny County place trust in their elected officials that they will attend to their elected secular duties. Spending taxpayer time and dime on resolutions about god is beyond the scope of secular government. Additionally, it does not inspire confidence that county officials apparently feel “In God We Trust” must be displayed at the county courthouse in order for you to make the right civic decisions.

Given the many important issues Council Members were elected to address, citizens deserve a Council that won’t waste resources decorating the meeting room. At the very least, the Council should not display a message that excludes so many citizens.

On behalf of Allegheny County residents and taxpayers, we urge you not to vote to place “In God We Trust” on county property. Making piety synonymous with patriotism, as one Council Member has unfortunately done publicly, essentially amounts to an unconstitutional religious test for good citizenship. The County should respect the rights of conscience of all citizens, including those who in good conscience reject god belief.

Very truly,



Annie Laurie Gaylor  
Co-President

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<sup>1</sup> “Nones on the Rise: One-in-Five Adults Have No Religious Affiliation,” Pew Research Center, The Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life (October 9, 2012) *available at* <http://www.pewforum.org/Unaffiliated/nones-on-the-rise.aspx>

<sup>2</sup> Barry A. Kosmin and Ariela Keysar, American Religious Identification Survey 2008 Summary Report, 22 (2009) *available at* [http://commons.trincoll.edu/aris/files/2011/08/ARIS\\_Report\\_2008.pdf](http://commons.trincoll.edu/aris/files/2011/08/ARIS_Report_2008.pdf)