

# FREEDOM FROM RELIGION *foundation*

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November 22, 2023

**SENT VIA U.S. MAIL AND EMAIL: [jthatcher@dearborncounty.in.gov](mailto:jthatcher@dearborncounty.in.gov);  
[alittle@dearborncounty.in.gov](mailto:alittle@dearborncounty.in.gov); [rprobst@dearborncounty.in.gov](mailto:rprobst@dearborncounty.in.gov)**

Jim Thatcher, Art Little & Rick Probst  
Dearborn County Commissioners  
165 Mary Street  
Lawrenceburg, IN 47205

Re: Religious iconography and electioneering at church polling place

Dear County Commissioners Thatcher, Little, and Probst:

I am writing on behalf of the Freedom From Religion Foundation (FFRF) regarding a concern with one of Dearborn County's polling places, First Baptist Church Aurora, located at 6060 Blair Rd, Aurora, IN 47001. FFRF is a national nonprofit organization with over 40,000 members, including more than 500 members in Indiana. 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 Dearborn County citizen reported that during the November 7, 2023 election, First Baptist Church Aurora displayed political signs promoting specific candidates on Church property while serving as a polling place. Further, we are told that the Church allowed candidates to loiter on the property and solicit voters as they were entering the Church to vote. Additionally, our complainant states that the exterior of the Church includes a large Latin cross that voters were not reasonably able to avoid viewing in the process of voting. Please see the enclosed photo of the Church's exterior.

It is our understanding that there are secular buildings in the City of Aurora that could serve as adequate alternative polling places. For instance, our complainant states that the Aurora Lions Club Building and the Aurora City Park Pavilion were polling locations prior to the Church being used as a polling location.

We ask that the Commission, as the election authority for Dearborn County, seriously reconsider allowing area churches to be polling places. Indiana is religiously diverse, and requiring that citizens enter houses of worship and view religious iconography in order to vote is intimidating and alienating for citizens who are nonreligious or who subscribe to minority religions. Per Indiana law, public buildings, including school buildings and fire stations, must be made available without charge for use as polling places. Ind. Code § 3-11-8-4. We are sure that there are many secular public buildings, such as those mentioned above, that could be used as polling places in the City of Aurora.

Further, Indiana law states that campaign materials, including signs advocating for candidates, and electioneering, are not allowed within fifty feet of a polling place's designated entrance for voters. *See* Ind. Code §§ 3-14-3-16(a), 3-5-2-10. Here, it appears that First Baptist Church Aurora may have violated this law by displaying candidate signs on its property within fifty feet of the designated entrance and allowing candidates to electioneer outside the polling place doors during election day.

If you deem it necessary to select churches or other religious properties as polling locations for further elections, it is inappropriate to allow these sites to display campaign signs or permit candidates to solicit votes on polling place property during the election. Additionally, whenever possible voters should not be made to observe religious iconography at their designated polling place, even if the iconography is part of the building's exterior.

Please inform us in writing of the steps you are taking to ensure that polling places are welcoming venues for all voters. Thank you for your time and attention.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Samantha F. Lawrence". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looped initial "S".

Samantha F. Lawrence  
*Anne Nicol Gaylor Legal Fellow*  
*Freedom From Religion Foundation*

Enclosure



CHRISTIAN LIFE CENTER

★★★★★  
To Re-Elect WRITE-IN  
MARK DRURY  
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