

FREEDOM FROM RELIGION *foundation*

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

April 5, 2023

SENT VIA EMAIL AND U.S. MAIL:

lake@ohiosos.gov

Dale H. Fellows
Chair
Lake County Board of Elections
PO Box 490
Painesville, OH 44077

Re: Illegal Proselytizing at Polling Place

Dear Mr. Fellows:

I am writing on behalf of the Freedom From Religion Foundation (FFRF) regarding a concern with one of Lake County's polling places, Life Line Church, located at 5236 Middle Ridge Rd. Madison, OH 44057. FFRF is a national nonprofit organization with over 39,000 members across the country, including more than 1,000 members in Ohio, and a local chapter in Cleveland, Northern Ohio Freethought Society. Our purposes are to protect the constitutional principle of separation between state and church, and to educate the public on matters relating to nontheism.

We are informed that during multiple elections since 2016, a Lake County polling place, Life Line Church, used the election as an opportunity to promote religious messaging to voters. While polling takes place, the church typically sets out a table with goodie bags encouraging voters to attend services at the church. It is our understanding that the table is placed in such a way that voters have no choice but to interact with the church volunteers. We were also informed that the church does not remove religious imagery and literature from areas that are used for voting, and that Republican "voting guides" are left out for voters by church members. Lastly, it is our understanding that the pastor of the church often lingers around the polling location, actively proselytizing to voters and poll workers.

We ask that Lake County seriously reconsider allowing area churches to be polling places. The State of Ohio is religiously diverse, and Christian messages and iconography are increasingly seen by many as symbols of political intimidation. At the very least, Life Line Church should not be permitted to serve as a polling place in the future given its attempt to proselytize voters on an election day.

We are sure there are many secular polling place locations that could accommodate voters and be relied on not to abuse voters' trust. FFRF receives many complaints each year from distressed citizens whose polling places are churches. Certainly, voters, who may be atheists or non-Christians, could feel intimidated when they must vote at a church and view religious messages while voting and are actively proselytized to at their voting site.

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 patently religious imagery or messages and preach to voters while acting as a designated polling location. At minimum, churches serving as polling places must be instructed to avoid displaying religious and political messages while voters are participating in their greatest civic duty.

Please inform us in writing of the steps you are taking to resolve this matter. Thank you for your time and attention.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Kat D. Grant", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Kat D. Grant

*Equal Justice Works Fellow (sponsored by the Wm. Collins Kohler Foundation)
Freedom From Religion Foundation*