

FREEDOM FROM RELIGION *foundation*

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March 13, 2020

SENT VIA U.S. MAIL AND EMAIL
mark.brnovich@azag.gov

The Honorable Mark Brnovich
Attorney General of Arizona
2005 N Central Avenue
Phoenix, AZ 85004

Re: Event falsely advertising coronavirus protection

Dear Attorney General Brnovich:

I am writing on behalf of the Freedom From Religion Foundation (FFRF) to alert you to an upcoming large gathering at the Phoenix Convention Center that is falsely advertising to attendees that they will be cured of the coronavirus at the event. FFRF is a national educational nonprofit with more than 31,700 members across the country, including more than 800 members in Arizona and a chapter in Phoenix, FFRF Valley of the Sun. FFRF protects the constitutional separation between state and church, and educates about nontheism.

An upcoming event titled “Passover 2020s: Decade of Awakening,” is scheduled to take place at the Phoenix Convention Center on April 9–12.¹ The event includes prominent televangelists and preachers, including President Trump’s spiritual advisor Paula White. These well-known speakers are expected to draw a significant crowd of believers from around the country.

One of the event’s co-sponsors, the Elijah List, recently published and emailed a promotion of the event with the title and subject line, “Supernatural Protection from the CoronaVirus Now.” At this time, there is no cure. There is no vaccine. The only protections we have are preventive measures, such as *not gathering in large groups*. This disreputable advertisement urges the public to purchase non-refundable tickets to the event, even assuring them that attending the event will protect them from the pandemic currently sweeping the country, and will even cure those already infected

¹ See thegloryzone.org.

(thereby recklessly encouraging those who may have the coronavirus to attend and spread the disease):²

Today many people including Believers are in fear of the corona virus among other sicknesses. **But the Word of God promises us protection from these very things. We hear reports of a thousand infected but Psalm 91 says, “A thousand may fall at your side, ten thousand at your right hand, but it will not come near you.”** How seriously do we really believe and know how to activate this? [...]

Psalms 91 clearly tells us that we can claim protection from every pestilence, sickness, untimely death and every plague. Also when we celebrate Passover as Jesus instructed **there is a supernatural protection that is activated when we apply Jesus Blood and celebrate the Passover Lamb.** In the days ahead beyond 2020 having a deep revelation about Passover and the Blood in a fresh new way will cause a greater level of the Glory of God in our life and supernatural protection from many things that are plaguing our world as **we carry the cure for every virus and plague! We have the Blood and power of Jesus to heal every disease and keep us supernaturally healthy like the great missionary to South Africa, John G Lake, who went and healed thousands during a pandemic of disease to the amazement of the government and doctors at the time.**

There has never been a better time to activate the power, glory and protection of Passover in 2020 by coming together as God instructs during Passover and activating the reason for the season.

It is egregious that event organizers are urging Arizona residents to buy tickets and join a massive crowd at a time when public health officials are strongly urging people *not* to congregate. Beyond that, **the organizers are actively misrepresenting their ability to protect against, and cure, the COVID-19 coronavirus.**

While any responsible event organizer would either cancel the event or, at a minimum, urge the elderly and those with underlying health issues to stay home, these organizers instead promote their non-refundable tickets along with assurances that they “carry the cure for every virus and plague,” after specifically noting fears over the current pandemic. Besides potentially spreading the virus among attendees, who have been

² *Supernatural Protection from the CoronaVirus Now*, The Elijah List, available at www.elijahlist.com/words/display_word.html?ID=23357 (emphasis added).

reassured that they are protected, this promise of a “cure,” as noted above, could even attract attendees who *know* that they are infected with the virus.

The message and intent is clear: Buy a ticket from us and you will be protected from the coronavirus. This is false and it will endanger health and lives. This is a deadly threat and we ask that you investigate these concerns and take immediate steps to protect the public by making the planners halt these false claims of possessing a COVID-19 coronavirus cure, and asking or ordering, if appropriate, the organizers to cancel the event.

As you know, the Arizona Consumer Fraud Act defines an unlawful practice as:

The act, use or employment by any person of any deception, deceptive or unfair act or practice, fraud, false pretense, false promise, misrepresentation, or concealment, suppression or omission of any material fact with intent that others rely on such concealment, suppression or omission, in connection with the sale or advertisement of any merchandise whether or not any person has in fact been misled, deceived or damaged thereby ...

A.R.S. § 44-1522(A).

These terms are interpreted broadly, including “merchandise,” which is defined as “any objects, wares, goods, commodities, intangibles, real estate, or services.” A.R.S. § 44-1521(5). Non-refundable tickets to the “Passover 2020s: Decade of Awakening” fall under this broad definition of selling or advertising merchandise.

Promising that attending the event will include a “supernatural protection” and a “cure” for COVID-19 is a dangerous, false promise designed to entice consumers to rely on by deciding to attend this large gathering against the advice of public health officials. The organizers even acknowledge that their claims conflict with public health advice by comparing their event to a faith healer who they claim “healed thousands during a pandemic of disease to the amazement of the government and doctors at the time.” This false promise is an unlawful practice under the Arizona Consumer Fraud Act.

Capitalizing on the national fear related to this pandemic is sadly endemic for opportunistic fraudsters recently. Other state attorneys general have taken strong action to protect their states’ residents from similar dangerous claims of being able to cure the virus. Missouri Attorney General Eric Schmitt brought a lawsuit against the well-known “faith healer” and televangelist Jim Bakker—previously convicted and

imprisoned for fraud—for claiming that his silver-based solution can cure COVID-19.³ Yesterday, New York Attorney General Letitia James announced that she has ordered Alex Jones to immediately stop selling and marketing products as a treatment or cure for COVID-19 on his website.⁴ These tickets and the false promise of protection they offer are no different than Alex Jones' or Jim Bakker's fraudulent cures.

You are renowned for fighting against consumer fraud and for promoting efforts nation-wide to protect seniors and combat elder abuse. This fraud sits at the intersection of those two issues. We trust that you will take appropriate action to protect those headed to the Phoenix Convention Center on April 9–12 and hold organizers responsible for falsely claiming that attendees will be protected and cured of the COVID-19 coronavirus, in violation of the Arizona Consumer Fraud Act.

Thank you for taking swift action to address this imminent threat to public health due to consumer fraud. We would appreciate a response in writing indicating the action you decide to take to address this immediate and serious threat to public health.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Ryan D. Jayne". The signature is stylized and cursive.

Ryan D. Jayne
Staff Attorney

³ See, e.g. Matthew Schwartz, *Missouri Sues Televangelist Jim Bakker for Selling Fake Coronavirus Cure*, National Public Radio (Mar. 11, 2020).

⁴ Associated Press, *Conspiracy Theorist Alex Jones Must Stop Hawking Phony Coronavirus Treatments, NY Attorney General Demands* (Mar. 13, 2020).