

# FREEDOM FROM RELIGION *foundation*

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

September 1, 2023

**SENT VIA EMAIL & U.S. MAIL: [contact@communitylibrary.net](mailto:contact@communitylibrary.net)**

Rachelle Ottosen  
Chair  
Community Library Network Board of Trustees  
821 N. Spokane St.  
Post Falls, ID 83854

Re: Religiously-motivated Sunday Closings

Dear Chair Ottosen:

I am writing on behalf of the Freedom From Religion Foundation (FFRF) to object to your recent proposal to close two libraries on Sunday in observance of the Sabbath, and to request that you cease using your position to impose your personal religious beliefs onto others. FFRF is a national nonprofit organization with more than 40,000 members across the country, including members in Idaho. 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 community member has reported that you have been using your position to promote your personal religious beliefs, including attempting to close down some libraries on Sundays in order to observe the Sabbath. At the July 20, 2023 meeting during a discussion about closing libraries on Sunday, you said:

Um, well I know many at these tables don't subscribe to this, but the Lord blesses people who keep the Sabbath Day holy. I think having people work on Sunday is actually to our detriment.

At the next meeting, on July 25, 2023, you quoted a bible verse to justify why you wanted to close the libraries on Sundays:

Exodus 20:8-10 says "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days shalt thou labor, and do all thy work: But the seventh day is the sabbath of the Lord thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates...so it sounds like we shouldn't be causing other people to work as long as were not working ourselves."

We understand that you were immediately rebuked by another member of the Board because the Board "is a government agency." They correctly explained that the Board must act in a religiously neutral manner. They then asked that you please not quote from the bible at the meeting. You then quoted several founding fathers claiming that they supported your belief that you should be imposing your personal religious beliefs onto citizens and your fellow board members at this public meeting. You ended by stating it was in the Board's best interest to "not dishonor God."

We write to request that you cease using your position to promote your personal religious beliefs. While Board members are free to promote their personal religious beliefs however they wish in their personal capacities outside of the Board, as public officials they cannot be allowed to commandeer the Board in order to impose their personal religious beliefs on the community or fellow Board members by reading bible passages and suggesting the Board must follow biblical edicts.

Our Constitution’s Establishment Clause—which protects Americans’ religious freedom by ensuring the continued separation of religion and government—dictates that the government cannot in any way show favoritism toward religion. As the Supreme Court has put it, “the First Amendment mandates governmental neutrality between religion and religion, and between religion and nonreligion.” *McCreary Cty. v. ACLU*, 545 U.S. 844, 860 (2005); *Wallace v. Jaffree*, 472 U.S. 38, 53 (1985); *Epperson v. Arkansas*, 393 U.S. 97, 104 (1968); *Everson v. Bd. of Educ. of Ewing*, 330 U.S. 1, 15–16 (1947).

As Board members, you serve a diverse population that consists not only of Christians, but also minority religious and nonreligious community members. Reading bible passages at meetings and suggesting that everyone must follow your religion’s rules sends a message that excludes those who are among the 37 percent of Americans who are non-Christians, including the nearly one in three adult Americans (29 percent) who are religiously unaffiliated.<sup>1</sup> Using your position to advance your personal religious beliefs needlessly alienates non-Christian and nonreligious community members, turning them into outsiders in their own community. While many community members may support these religious sentiments, a significant proportion are excluded by them.

While Board members are certainly free to express their religious beliefs in their private capacity outside of their role on the Board, it is unconstitutional for public officials to push their personal religious beliefs during public meetings and to adopt policies based on those beliefs with no secular justification. We request that members of the Board refrain from discussing their religious beliefs during meetings in order to uphold the rights of conscience embodied in our First Amendment. Please inform us in writing at your earliest convenience with an assurance that this won’t happen again in the future.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Chris Line". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Christopher Line  
Staff Attorney  
Freedom From Religion Foundation

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<sup>1</sup> Gregory A. Smith, *About Three-in-Ten U.S. Adults Are Now Religiously Unaffiliated*, Pew Research Center (Dec. 14, 2021), [www.pewforum.org/2021/12/14/about-three-in-ten-u-s-adults-are-now-religiously-unaffiliated/](http://www.pewforum.org/2021/12/14/about-three-in-ten-u-s-adults-are-now-religiously-unaffiliated/).