

# FREEDOM FROM RELIGION *foundation*

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**SENT VIA EMAIL & U.S. MAIL: [rchapman@cops.usdoj.gov](mailto:rchapman@cops.usdoj.gov)**

Acting Director Robert Chapman  
U.S. Department of Justice  
Office of Community Oriented Policing Services  
145 N Street NE  
Washington, DC 20530

Re: Religious activities at Faith and Blue events

Dear Director Chapman:

I am writing on behalf of the Freedom From Religion Foundation (FFRF) about the inclusion of religious activities in many Faith and Blue events across the nation. FFRF is a national nonprofit organization with more than 38,000 members across the country. Our purposes are to protect the constitutional principle of separation between state and church and to educate the public on matters relating to nontheism.

Each year for the three years Faith and Blue has occurred, the Freedom From Religion Foundation has received complaints from our members as well as members of the public about their local law enforcement agencies promoting religion at these events. FFRF recognizes that the organizers of Faith and Blue list commendable secular goals of community building as the driving force behind the events.<sup>1</sup> However, we write to bring the DOJ's attention to the fact that in practice, Faith and Blue events often include religious activity and exclude the nonreligious, demonstrating the danger of governmental partnerships with faith-based groups.

Given this now clear track record of religion mixing with a federally-promoted event, we are urging the Office of Community Oriented Policing Services to expand "Faith and Blue Weekend" to encompass all community groups, not just faith-based organizations, and to rename the event to reflect a more inclusive outlook, such as "Community and Blue." The website and official guidance for Faith and Blue events should clearly state that religious activities may not be a part of Faith and Blue events, and that those events should remain focused on the event organizers' stated goals of "facilitat[ing] safer, stronger, more just and unified communities by directly enabling local partnerships among law enforcement professionals, residents, businesses and community groups through the connections of local faith-based organizations." But we urge changing the conclusion to remove "through the connections of local faith-based organizations."

There is no reason to single out faith-based organizations over other important community groups for their own weekend of partnerships with local law enforcement. And, under our

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<sup>1</sup> See, e.g., <https://faithandblue.org/about/>.

Establishment Clause and vaunted separation of church and state, there is every reason not to sponsor or promote an event that is undoubtedly going to create confusion about those boundaries, and appears to place “Faith” on an exalted plane. Regardless of stated secular goals for the event, putting the word “Faith” in the title leads community members to assume these events will be religious and encourages faith-based groups or law enforcement officials to view the federally-promoted events as mission fields and recruiting territory.

Below are examples of just some instances of religious activities inappropriate for publicly-sponsored events that have occurred as part of “Faith and Blue.” For example, the City of Dover, Delaware’s 2022 event includes worship services. The only activity scheduled for this Sunday in Dover as part of Faith and Blue is an invitation for the community to join Dover police officers and city officials “in an afternoon of fellowship in worship” at local churches.<sup>2</sup> Its flier for the event proclaims that “we are strongest when together, we believe!,” implying that nonbelievers are not contributors to a strong community. It is difficult to understand how inserting divisive religion into a public event promotes “unified communities,” yet [faithandblue.org](http://faithandblue.org) promotes this worship event on its website.<sup>3</sup>

In 2020, the Greenville, South Carolina Sheriff’s Office put out a video for Faith and Blue weekend, which the sheriff took as an opportunity to share his personal religious views. In the video, he said, “There is no doubt that we live in uncertain times. But one thing is certain, and that’s the love that Jesus Christ has for each one of us . . . the one constant we have is the relationship we have with our Lord and Savior. I encourage each of you to pray for us in law enforcement . . . Remember that God is in control.”<sup>4</sup>

A Detroit police chaplain used the department’s 2020 Faith and Blue event to broadcast a prayer from a patrol vehicle’s loudspeaker, coercing all in the vicinity to listen to a government-sponsored prayer: “In the name of Jesus Christ, Father, we need you to go into each and every house, Father, and loosen those handcuffs, in the name of Jesus Christ, . . . we’re praying for your protection.”<sup>5</sup>

These types of incidents crossing the constitutional line are inevitable when the federal government encourages law enforcement agencies to put on a “Faith” event, despite any professed secular goals for holding such events. We urge COPS to reimagine this annual program to include all community organizations, not just the faith-based ones, and delete the word “Faith” in the event name to make it clear these are intended to be secular events. This will lessen the likelihood for law enforcement agencies to treat these events as an opportunity to push religion, excluding the almost 30 percent of adult Americans today who are nonreligious.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/photo?fbid=470592921765336>

<sup>3</sup> <https://faithandblue.org/event/12226/>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=1066953120420798>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.faithpot.com/detroit-police-chaplain-prays-for-city-nora-jones/>

<sup>6</sup> Gregory A. Smith, *About Three-in-Ten U.S. Adults Are Now Religiously Unaffiliated*, Pew Research Center (Dec. 14, 2021), *available at* [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/).

At a minimum, the Faith and Blue website and official guidance should make it much more clear that the Constitution requires such events to be secular and explicitly discourage local event organizers from including religious activities as part of their Faith and Blue Weekend events. While the 2022 planning toolkit says, “At their core, all Faith & Blue events will be designed to facilitate connections between the public and law enforcement rather than engage in religious activities,” it contradicts this advice by listing “Interfaith Prayer Experience,” “Prayer Vigil,” and “Prayer Service/Worship” as activity ideas for Faith and Blue.<sup>7</sup> These suggestions must be removed in the future. The statement that these events are not about engaging in religious activities should be made much more prominent on the Faith and Blue website and guidance, as many law enforcement agencies are ignoring this.

Minority religious and nonreligious citizens should not be made to feel excluded, or like outsiders in their own community, because the city governments, sheriff’s offices, and police departments that they support with their taxes put on a religious event and encourage members of the public to participate in church services, prayer or other religious activities.

We request that the Department of Justice COPS program take immediate action to prevent future constitutional violations stemming from Faith and Blue events nationwide.

Very truly,



Dan Barker and Annie Laurie Gaylor  
Co-Presidents  
Freedom From Religion Foundation

ALG/DB:mez

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<sup>7</sup> <https://faithandblue.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/FB-Activity-Planning-Toolkit-2022-1.pdf>