

# FREEDOM FROM RELIGION *foundation*

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February 23 , 2022

**SENT VIA EMAIL AND U.S. MAIL**  
**eadams@cityhall.nyc.gov**

The Honorable Eric Adams  
Mayor of New York City  
City Hall  
New York, NY 10007

Re: Unconstitutional faith-based office and anti-gay appointments

Dear Mayor Adams:

We are writing on behalf of the Freedom From Religion Foundation (FFRF) to object to your reported creation of a religious office, and to your appointment of openly anti-gay faith leaders to fill that office. FFRF is a national nonprofit organization with more than 37,000 members across the country, including more than 1,900 members in New York. FFRF protects the constitutional separation between state and church and educates about nontheism.

It is our understanding that you recently created an Office of Faith-Based and Community Partnerships, and that you have made three appointments to that office who have well-established records of being anti-gay, anti-abortion, or both.

We share the outrage of the LGBTQ community, who feel understandably betrayed that you would make these appointments. We also must emphasize your apparent betrayal to the secular community by creating a religious office within your administration, apparently modeled after an office created by President George W. Bush, at a time when Americans' right to a secular government is in great peril. This is in part due to pious or pandering politicians inserting their personal religious beliefs into the government, combined with a U.S. Supreme Court that is poised to grant special legal exceptions to the same sorts of discriminatory religious beliefs held by your recent appointees. You should not only rescind these alarming appointments, but should also scrap this ill-conceived faith-based office altogether.

The Freedom From Religion Foundation was the most vociferous critic of President George W. Bush's egregious action to establish a "faith-based initiative," which has created so much bad precedent to entangle religion and government. Our lawsuit over the creation of a faith-based office in the White House and at the cabinet level went all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court. In *Hein v. FFRF*, issued in 2007, the high court in a 5-4 decision (following the unfortunate resignation of Justice Sandra Day O'Connor), ruled that FFRF had no right to sue the executive branch for entangling state and church. In fact, the ruling made clear that no citizen would have the right to sue the president for setting up a faith-based office in the White House.

It is important to note that the Supreme Court did not find the office constitutional, never ruling on the merits of the case. That office is indeed unconstitutional, and it has been abused to reward churches that support political candidates, among other things. Christian organizations have been given high preference under previous administrations. Said one Bush official, "When I saw one of those non-Christian groups in the set [of grants] I was reviewing, I just stopped looking at them and gave them a zero. . . . A lot of us did." Bush used the office to compensate his supporters: evangelical Christians. Former President Trump notoriously appointed televangelist Paula White to run the office.

Although Presidents Obama and Biden have watered down this office somewhat, the office unfortunately still exists, immune to legal challenges from U.S. taxpayers. This is an outrage and a stain on our country's proud secular heritage, not something to be replicated in New York City. Creating this office sends a message to nonreligious New Yorkers that they are not favored members of the community, and that faith leaders in the city have outsized influence.

Non-religious Americans are the fastest-growing segment of the U.S. population by religious identification — 35 percent of Americans are non-Christians, and this includes the more than one in four Americans who now identify as religiously unaffiliated. A recent survey found that 21 percent of Americans born after 1999 are atheist or agnostic. You should be standing up for secular values and secular New Yorkers, not imposing faith-based offices on them.

You compound this egregious decision by filling the office with people who have strong, documented histories of religious bigotry and religiously-motivated opposition to progressive values like reproductive healthcare. You reportedly said that you selected Pastor Gilford Monroe to run the office because of his "talent for

building bridges between diverse communities.”<sup>1</sup> It is hard to understand how you think Monrose could “build bridges” between communities when he—fairly recently—compared the gay “lifestyle” to smokers, has repeatedly opposed marriage equality by suggesting same-sex parents harm children, and supported discrimination in adoption and foster care.<sup>2</sup>

You also reportedly appointed Fernando Cabrera, who notoriously supported the Ugandan government’s bans on gay marriage and abortion in 2014, and reiterated his opposition to both in 2019,<sup>3</sup> and Pastor Erick Salgado, who openly opposed marriage equality as recently as 2013, and has apparently never definitively supported it, only cryptically saying that his views have “evolved as society has evolved,”<sup>4</sup> which is a far cry from an honest apology for homophobia.

Religion is a divisive force in society, and is the main driving force behind anti-LGBTQ bigotry. Creating a faith-based office and packing it with anti-LGBTQ individuals is alarming and unacceptable. These decisions should be reversed immediately, and you should apologize to secular New Yorkers as well as the LGBTQ community.

Very truly,



Annie Laurie Gaylor & Dan Barker  
Co-presidents  
ALG/DB:rdj

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<sup>1</sup> *Caribbean Pastor Named Head Of New Office Of Faith-Based And Community Partnerships In New York City*, News Americas Now (Feb. 22, 2022), available at [www.newsamericasnow.com/caribbean-pastor-named-head-of-new-york-city-office-of-faith-based-and-community-partnerships/](http://www.newsamericasnow.com/caribbean-pastor-named-head-of-new-york-city-office-of-faith-based-and-community-partnerships/).

<sup>2</sup> Adam Humm, *Adams’ Appointments Draw Further Criticism From LGBTQ Community*, Gay City News (Feb. 16, 2022), available at [gaycitynews.com/adams-appointments-draw-further-criticism-from-lgbtq-community/](http://gaycitynews.com/adams-appointments-draw-further-criticism-from-lgbtq-community/).

<sup>3</sup> David Meyer and Carl Campanile, *Mayor Adams eyeing Fernando Cabrera to run rebranded ThriveNYC*, The New York Post (Feb. 3, 2022).

<sup>4</sup> Katie Honan and Claudia Irizarry Aponte, *Another Adams Pick With Anti-LGBTQ+ Views Shows ‘Trend’*, The City (Feb. 18, 2022), available at [www.thecity.nyc/2022/2/18/22941317/another-adams-pick-with-anti-lgbtq-views-shows-trend](http://www.thecity.nyc/2022/2/18/22941317/another-adams-pick-with-anti-lgbtq-views-shows-trend).