

FREEDOM FROM RELIGION *foundation*

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

December 18, 2020

SENT VIA FAX & U.S. MAIL: 724-430-2047

Janet Trees and Lauren Mahoney-Yohman
Jury Commissioners
Fayette County Jury Commissioners' Office
61 E. Main Street
Uniontown, PA 15401

Re: Unconstitutional Religious Message on Jury Summons

Dear Commissioner Trees and Commissioner Mahoney-Yohman:

I am writing on behalf of the Freedom From Religion Foundation (FFRF) regarding a constitutional violation that recently occurred in Fayette County. FFRF is a national nonprofit organization with more than 33,000 members across the country, including more than 1,000 members in Pennsylvania. 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 local Fayette County resident has reported they received a jury summons that included a bible verse, "Let everyone be subject to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. Romans 13:1 NIV." Please see the enclosed photo.

We are writing to inform the Fayette County Jury Commissioners' Office that as a government entity, it cannot include religious messages on official government correspondence or summons. The Commissioners' Office including bible verses on its jury summons violates the Establishment Clause by favoring a religious message and the practice must be discontinued.

As an entity of the municipal government, the Fayette County Jury Commissioners' Office has a constitutional obligation to remain neutral regarding religion. The Supreme Court has long recognized that the First Amendment "mandates governmental neutrality between religion and religion, and between religion and nonreligion." *McCreary County 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). When the Jury Commissioners' Office shares passages from the bible, it violates this neutrality.

Inserting bible verses into jury summons suggests that Christianity is the preferred religion of the County. This sends the message to all minority religious or nonreligious constituents that they "are outsiders, not full members of the political community, and an accompanying message to adherents that they are insiders, favored members of the political community." *Lynch v.*

Donnelly, 465 U.S. 668, 688 (1984) (O'Connor, J., concurring). Suggesting that the County prefers Christianity alienates non-religious and non-Christian citizens. Today nearly one-quarter of Americans, 24%, are religiously unaffiliated, and another 7% belong to religious minorities, making nearly one-third of our population non-Christians, either practicing a minority religion or no religion at all.¹

The Fayette County Jury Commissioners' Office is tasked with serving all citizens, regardless of their personal religious beliefs. We ask that it refrain from including bible verses on its summons or any other official correspondence in the future. Please inform us in writing of the steps you take to address this constitutional concern. Thank you for your time and attention to this matter.

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

Enclosure

¹ Robert P. Jones & Daniel Cox, *America's Changing Religious Identity*, Public Religion Research Institute (Sept. 6, 2017), available at <https://www.pri.org/research/american-religious-landscape-christian-religiously-unaffiliated/>.

FAYETTE COUNTY JURY COMMISSIONERS OFFICE- 724-430-1279

----- JUROR INFORMATION -----

*****FIREARMS ARE NOT PERMITTED IN THE COURTHOUSE*****

Please allow sufficient time since the Sheriff's Deputy shall conduct a search by x-ray machine and walk through metal detector upon entering the Courthouse.

HOW YOU WERE SELECTED AS A JUROR – Names of potential jurors are randomly drawn from the Voter Registration, the Department of Transportation, the Department of Revenue, and the Department of Welfare lists. Once summoned, you are required to complete and return both the qualification questionnaire and confidential questionnaire then mail the forms within seven (7) days in the provided postage paid envelope. Jury service is dependent both upon an individual meeting the legal qualifications for service and upon the random chance of having one's name drawn from the source's lists.

PETIT JURORS – Petit Jurors participate in criminal and civil trials and render a verdict after listening to the evidence and arguments by all parties, following a set of instructions given by the presiding judge. After you arrive for jury duty, the Court will randomly draw small panels of jurors who will be escorted to a particular courtroom to be questioned for possible service on a trial. The Judge and attorneys on the case will ask questions of the jurors, and then the attorneys for the parties will have the opportunity to select a jury by striking certain individuals from the panel. Individual questioning of jurors typically does not occur unless the nature of the case is a capital murder case.

WHEN AND WHERE TO REPORT – **THIS** is your official summons and only notice to report. You **MUST** report promptly to **Courtroom No. 1 of the Fayette County Courthouse (second floor)** on the date and time indicated on the front of **THIS** summons. Bring **THIS** summons with you. The Court will notify you each day as to the length of your service. Allow time for parking.

LETTERS FOR EMPLOYERS may be obtained from the Administrative Office the Fayette County Courts (located on the Third Floor of the Courthouse) at the conclusion of your service as a juror which may extend beyond your second day. If you are seated on a trial you will be requested to stay until it is concluded.

ATTIRE – Dress comfortably but appropriately with respect to the Court and the parties. Shorts, hats, T-shirts, tank and halter-tops are **not** permitted. We cannot be responsible for personal belongings, so please bring only what you need.

PARKING – PARKING GARAGES are located at the corner of Gallatin Ave. and Peter St. (across from City Hall) Cost \$6.00. A small parking lot is located on Main St. (just past the Courthouse on the left) Cost \$5.00. ALSO PARK IN PARKING GARAGE ON CHURCH STREET & BEESON AVE Cost \$6.00. If you use parking meters, you may not be permitted to leave to feed the meters.

THE COUNTY COMMISSIONERS PROHIBIT BRINGING FOOD ITEMS INTO COURTHOUSE.

DO NOT take food items or reading materials into the courtroom. Those items are prohibited.

IN THE EVENT OF A COURTHOUSE EMERGENCY WHILE ON JURY DUTY – Exit the building and immediately report to the State Theater located at 37 E. Main St., so we may account for your safety.

Let everyone be subject to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. **Romans 13:1 NIV**