

# FREEDOM FROM RELIGION *foundation*

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May 12, 2022

**SENT VIA EMAIL AND U.S. MAIL**

**glenn.youngkin@governor.virginia.gov**

The Hon. Glenn Youngkin  
Governor of Virginia  
State Capitol Third Floor  
Richmond, VA 23219

Re: Divisive religious content in diversity training

Dear Gov. Youngkin:

We are writing on behalf of the Freedom From Religion Foundation (FFRF) to object to references to your personal religious beliefs in the context of an official state training session. FFRF is a national nonprofit organization with more than 36,000 members across the country, including more than 800 members in Virginia. FFRF protects the constitutional separation between state and church and educates about nontheism.

It is our understanding that in order to comply with a requirement to provide online diversity and cultural competency training, your administration developed a mandatory training video for state employees. In that video, you reportedly stated that “Above all, each one of us is created in the image of our Creator,” and commented on “what is sought in our hearts by a loving, almighty Creator.”<sup>1</sup> State employees reportedly complained anonymously about this inappropriate religious training, reasonably fearing retaliation if they made their complaints openly.<sup>2</sup>

It is admirable that Virginia state employees are being provided diversity and cultural competency training, but unfortunately your insertion of personal religious beliefs into the training material directly undermines this effort. As governor, you should be the state government’s leading example of how to take action for the benefit of *all* Virginians, regardless of their diverse backgrounds and beliefs.

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<sup>1</sup> Virginia News, *Youngkin’s ‘almighty maker’ rhetoric in new diversity training angers some state employees* (May 11, 2022), available at [darik.news/virginia/youngkins-almighty-maker-rhetoric-in-new-diversity-training-angers-some-state-employees/202205602582.html](https://www.darik.news/virginia/youngkins-almighty-maker-rhetoric-in-new-diversity-training-angers-some-state-employees/202205602582.html).

<sup>2</sup> *Id.*

Nonreligious Americans make up the fastest-growing segment of the U.S. population by religious identification, and in fact are now the largest demographic by “denomination.” Three-in-ten Americans (29 percent) are unaffiliated, identifying themselves as atheists, agnostics or “nothing in particular” when asked their religion.<sup>3</sup> A recent survey found that 21 percent of Americans born after 1999 are atheist or agnostic.<sup>4</sup> The total of non-Christians overall, including nonbelievers and those who ascribe to other faiths, is now 35 percent of the population.<sup>5</sup> Telling these Virginians that “each one” of them is “created” in the image of a “creator” they do not believe in is exclusionary, and “sends the ancillary message to . . . nonadherents ‘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.’” *Santa Fe Indep. Sch. Dist. v. Doe*, 530 U.S. 290, 309–10 (2000) (quoting *Lynch v. Donnelly*).

This is precisely the sort of cultural tone-deafness that your training video should have warned state employees to avoid. In fact, in the future you should consider including this religious speech in the training video as a clear example of what *not* to do, just as mandatory employee training videos on sexual harrasment often include dramatized depictions of inappropriate workplace interactions.

You were elected governor, not preacher. We ask that you, as governor of Virginia, remain cognizant that you have taken an oath to uphold and defend the U.S. Constitution, an entirely godless and secular document, and are charged with great responsibility over citizens, including those citizens who may not share your personal religious viewpoints. To show that you value the diversity of Virginians, your oath of office, and your employees who have felt the need to complain anonymously, the solution is simple: Discontinue using your official office to promote your personal religion.

Very truly,



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

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<sup>3</sup> *About three-in-ten U.S. adults are now religiously unaffiliated*, Pew Research Center, Gregory A. Smith, Dec. 14, 2021,

[www.pewresearch.org/religion/2021/12/14/about-three-in-ten-u-s-adults-are-now-religiously-unaffiliated/](http://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2021/12/14/about-three-in-ten-u-s-adults-are-now-religiously-unaffiliated/).

<sup>4</sup> *Atheism Doubles Among Generation Z*, The Barna Group (Jan. 24, 2018),

[www.barna.com/research/atheism-doubles-among-generation-z/](http://www.barna.com/research/atheism-doubles-among-generation-z/).

<sup>5</sup> *About three-in-ten U.S. adults are now religiously unaffiliated*, Pew Research Center, Gregory A. Smith, Dec. 14, 2021.