

# FREEDOM FROM RELIGION *foundation*

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

April 11, 2023

**SENT VIA EMAIL & U.S. MAIL: [sheriffgriffin@hendersoncountync.gov](mailto:sheriffgriffin@hendersoncountync.gov)**

Sheriff Lowell Griffin  
Henderson County Sheriff's Office  
100 North Grove Street  
Hendersonville, NC 28792

Re: Unconstitutional Religious Display

Dear Sheriff Griffin:

I am writing on behalf of the Freedom From Religion Foundation (FFRF) regarding a constitutional violation occurring in Henderson County. FFRF is a national nonprofit organization with more than 40,000 members across the country, including more than 900 members and a local chapter in North Carolina. 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 Henderson County resident has reported that the Henderson County Sheriff's Office displays "Blessed are the peacemakers for they shall be called children of God - Matthew 5:9" on one of its walls. Please see the enclosed screenshot.

It is inappropriate and unconstitutional for the Sheriff's Office to promote Christianity on the walls of its office. We ask that the Sheriff's Office remove the bible verse display immediately in order to respect the rights of all Henderson County residents.

The Supreme Court has long held that the Establishment Clause "mandates government neutrality between religion and religion, and between religion and nonreligion." *McCreary Cty., Ky. v. Am. Civil Liberties Union of Ky.*, 545 U.S. 844, 860 (2005); *Wallace v. Jaffree*, 472 U.S. 38, 53 (1985); *Epperson v. Ark.*, 393 U.S. 97, 104 (1968); *Everson v. Bd. of Educ. of Ewing*, 330 U.S. 1, 15-16 (1947). The Sheriff's Office's display conveys a message to non-Christians that they are not welcome or accepted in Henderson County.

Citizens interact with and rely on law enforcement officers during some of the most urgent and vulnerable times of their lives. As Sheriff, you serve a diverse population that consists of not only Christians, but also minority religious and nonreligious citizens. We hope you will agree that the Sheriff's Office must be even-handed and avoid any appearance of bias toward some citizens or hostility toward others. Religious messages sent by your office exclude those who are a part of thirty-seven percent of Americans who are non-Christians, including the nearly one in

three Americans who are now religiously unaffiliated.<sup>1</sup> Religious messages coming from the Sheriff's Office needlessly alienate the non-Christian and nonreligious citizens in Henderson County, turning them into political outsiders in their own community.

The Henderson County Sheriff's Office serves all citizens regardless of belief or nonbelief. We urge the Sheriff's Office to recognize its obligation to provide all citizens with an environment free from religious coercion by removing this exclusionary display. Please respond in writing detailing the actions the Sheriff's Office has taken so that we may notify our complainant. 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

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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/).

