

# FREEDOM FROM RELIGION *foundation*

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

April 28, 2011

**SENT VIA U.S. MAIL & FAX  
(770) 528-2606**

David Hankerson  
County Manager  
100 Cherokee St  
Marietta GA 30090-9679

Re: Cobb County Support Services Agency's Involvement with Cobb County Prayer Breakfast

Dear Mr. Hankerson:

I am writing on behalf of our Cobb County membership, and other Georgia members of the Freedom From Religion Foundation ("FFRF"), to alert you to a serious separation between state and church concern occurring in the county offices. FFRF is a national nonprofit organization representing 16,500 freethinkers across the country including over 300 in Georgia. FFRF's purpose is to protect the constitutional principle of separation between state and church.

It is our information and understanding that the 2011 Cobb County Prayer Breakfast is scheduled for Thursday, May 5<sup>th</sup>, 7AM at the Cobb Galleria Centre. This prayer event coincides with the National Day of Prayer. We further understand that Mr. Virgil Moon, Director of Cobb County's Support Services Agency, is managing an "information line" about the prayer breakfast using a Cobb County government office line – (770) 528-3328. Mr. Virgil has confirmed this number is "run out of his office, and that his administrative staff is in charge of answering messages requesting information." Katy Ruth Camp, *Atheists Will Protest Prayer Meeting*, The Marietta Daily Journal, April 19, 2011. This set up has occurred since at least 2004. According to news reports, the committee reimburses the County for these costs. We further understand that Mr. Moon is the President of the Cobb County Prayer Breakfast Committee.

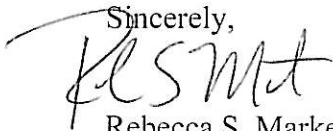
It is grossly inappropriate for Mr. Moon to dedicate a Cobb County ("County") telephone line to organize and promote an inherently religious event for the National Day of Prayer. The County cannot expend, even temporarily, government funds and resources to coordinate this event. In order to comply with current constitutional dictates, the County must immediately discontinue the practice of expending any taxpayer dollars and public resources to organize, coordinate, or otherwise promote the Cobb County Prayer Breakfast.

Any reasonable Cobb County resident or visitor would logically conclude that the County is co-hosting the event. This also leads to the inevitable conclusion that the County favors religion over non-religion. Furthermore, given the evangelical nature of National Day of Prayer events such as the Cobb County Prayer Breakfast, the reasonable observer would also believe that the County prefers Christianity over all other faiths.

The County government cannot engage in any conduct that gives the appearance of endorsing religion. Therefore, the County must take immediate action to disassociate itself from this Christian event. Use of any and all County telephone lines for the purpose of dispensing any information about the prayer breakfast should be discontinued immediately. Any promotional materials giving the County number should be retracted and revised.

Can your office assure our complainants that no public money is spent on this patently religious event or continue actions, which make it appear that the County is sponsoring the event? We ask that you inform us promptly, in writing, of the steps your office takes to remedy this serious Establishment Clause concern.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'RS Markert', with a large, sweeping flourish above the first few letters.

Rebecca S. Markert  
Staff Attorney

Cc: J. Virgil Moon, Director, Cobb County Support Services Agency