

FREEDOM FROM RELIGION *foundation*

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

February 2, 2024

SENT VIA FAX & U.S. MAIL: 815-434-8553

Region 2 Engineer Masood Ahmad
Illinois Department of Transportation
700 East Norris Drive
Ottawa, IL 61350-0697

Re: Concerns regarding religious little free library on county highway

Dear Mr. Ahmad:

I am writing on behalf of the Freedom From Religion Foundation (FFRF) regarding an apparently religious “Little Free Library” located on a Livingston County Highway. FFRF is a national nonprofit organization with over 40,000 members across the country, including more than 1200 members and a chapter in Illinois. 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 community member reported that there is currently a religious “Little Free Library” at the intersection of Old Route 66 and Livingston County East 1100 North Road at the Northwest corner. A Little Free Library is essentially a small kiosk filled with books where community members can take and leave a book for free. According to our complainant, this library is stocked entirely with Christian books, and there is a Latin cross painted on the side of the library. Please see the enclosed photograph of the library.

It is our understanding that the IDOT manages the right-of-way to that strip of land. Therefore, our complainant, and potentially other passersby, perceive this religious library as being owned and controlled by IDOT. We realize that IDOT may not be aware that this library currently exists on its property and that a state employee may not be the person(s) who created or controls the library. Nevertheless, we ask that IDOT investigate, and if IDOT does control this strip of land, the Latin cross should be removed from the library, and the library should be open to literature expressing a variety of viewpoints.

The government cannot constitutionally show favoritism towards religion over nonreligion, or one religion over other faiths. *See McCreary Cnty., Ky. v. ACLU of Ky.*, 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 Ed. of Ewing*, 330 U.S. 1, 15–16 (1947). Religious imagery and a Christian-only little free library on state property sends an exclusionary message that may

needlessly alienate travelers and community members who are non-Christians, including the nearly thirty percent of the population who are not religious.¹

We ask that IDOT investigate this situation. If the library is located on state property, the religious imagery must be removed and the library cannot only promote one favored religious viewpoint. Please inform us in writing of the steps that IDOT is taking to address this matter so that we may inform our complainant. Thank you for your time and attention.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Samantha F. Lawrence". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the typed name.

Samantha F. Lawrence
Anne Nicol Gaylor Legal Fellow
Freedom From Religion Foundation

SFL:hmj

Enclosures

¹ 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/.



