

FREEDOM FROM RELIGION *foundation*

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

September 5, 2024

SENT VIA EMAIL & U.S. MAIL: kcrook@monroems.com

Sheriff Kevin Crook
Monroe County Sheriff's Department
P.O. Box 683
Aberdeen, MS 39730

Re: Divisive promotion of religion

Dear Sheriff Crook:

I am writing on behalf of the Freedom From Religion Foundation (FFRF) regarding constitutional concerns with your use of the Monroe County Sheriff's Office's official communication channels to promote your personal religious beliefs. FFRF is a national nonprofit organization with 40,000 members across the country, including members in Mississippi. Our purposes are to protect the constitutional principle of separation between state and church, and to educate the public on matters relating to nontheism.

It was recently brought to our attention that you have been promoting your personal religious beliefs through the Sheriff's Office's official communication channels. For instance, the Sheriff's Office's page on the official Monroe County website includes, "In God We Trust!"¹ The Sheriff's Office's official Facebook page regularly posts religious content and messages. In April 2022, the Sheriff's Office changed its profile picture to a photo of a Sheriff's Office vehicle parked behind 3 Christian crosses. On August 3, 2024, the Sheriff's Office posted a long rant that ended with the message, "I don't know what the answer is Y'all, other than that we truly find Jesus..." That post was edited and you followed it up with a video earlier today where you added:

I don't know what the answer is, you know, I wish I did. I know Jesus is coming back one day and we've all got until that day to figure out our own eternities. And so on the grand scale of things today I would rather be concerned with that than anything else.

As Monroe County's highest law enforcement official, you are tasked with upholding the law. It is an abuse of power for you to use your position and the Monroe County Sheriff's Office's resources to promote your personal religious beliefs and proselytize to Monroe County's citizens. We ask that you remove any inappropriate social media posts, and refrain from promoting religion or posting religious messages on the Sheriff's Office's official Facebook page or through other official communication channels in the future.

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.*

¹ <https://www.monroems.com/sheriff.html>

Ark., 393 U.S. 97, 104 (1968); *Everson v. Bd. of Educ. of Ewing*, 330 U.S. 1, 15-16 (1947). Your posts on the Sheriff's Office's Facebook page convey a message to non-Christians that they are not welcome or accepted in Monroe County, and that their sheriff is more concerned with converting them to his religion than enforcing the law.

As you are aware, people 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 or hostility toward others. Religious statements made by your office send a message that excludes those community members who are a part of the nearly thirty percent of Americans who are now religiously unaffiliated, as well as the additional 6 percent of Americans adhering to non-Christian faiths.² Religious messages coming from the Sheriff's Office needlessly alienate the non-Christian and nonreligious citizens in Monroe County, turning them into political outsiders in their own community.

The Supreme Court recently described the power of social media sites as "the principal sources for knowing current events, checking ads for employment, speaking and listening in the modern public square, and otherwise exploring the vast realms of human thought and knowledge." *Packingham v. North Carolina*, 137 S. Ct. 1730, 1737 (2017) (internal citations omitted). Government entities must be particularly diligent not to entangle religious messages with official government pronouncements made in this "modern public square."

To avoid further Establishment Clause concerns, these posts should be removed, and the Monroe County Sheriff's Office must refrain from promoting religion on social media going forward. Please inform us in writing of the steps you are taking to respect the rights of conscience of all Monroe County residents, regardless of their personal religious or nonreligious beliefs. Thank you for your time and attention to this matter.

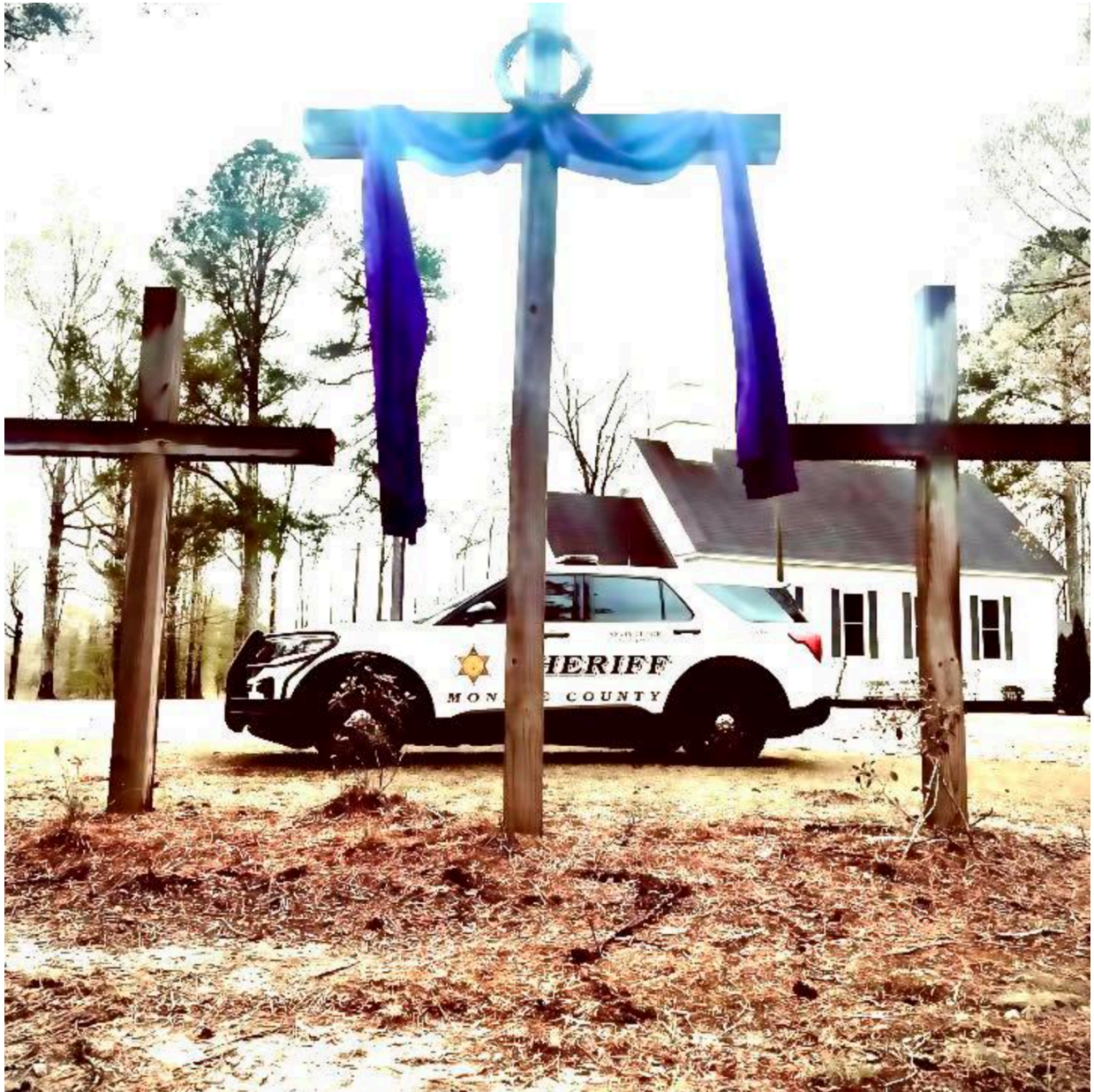
Sincerely,


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

Enclosures

² Gregory A. Smith, *Religious 'Nones' in America: Who They Are and What They Believe*, Pew Research Center, Jan. 24, 2024, <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2024/01/24/religious-nones-in-america-who-they-are-and-what-they-believe/>.



 **Monroe County, Ms Sheriff's Department**
13h · 🌐

██████████ was arrested at his home ██████████ Friday afternoon by members of Monroe County SWAT and NMNU.

His bond was set at \$50,000 by Justice Court Judge Brandon Davis.

At the time of this post, he is currently back at home and possibly back in business.

██████████'s charges on this latest arrest were:

TRAFFICKING METH- ENHANCED WITH A FIREARM
3 COUNTS OF POSSESSION OF A FIREARM BY CONVICTED FELON
(there were 3 handguns found in close proximity to narcotics)
1 COUNT of SALE OF METHAMPHETAMINE

I admit I am a little bit frustrated with this particular situation, because as my Chief Deputy noted Friday, there were three generations of Monroe County Narcotics Officers present for the execution of the warrant who have arrested ██████████ for selling drugs in Monroe County over the years.

I was with NMNU when we first executed a search warrant on ██████████ and arrested him at his residence ██████████ almost 20 years ago for distributing methamphetamine. He was convicted on those charges.

He has since been arrested and convicted on other drug charges related to distribution of Methamphetamine during my Chief Deputy's time in Narcotics, and now, he is facing 5 new felony charges under our current Narcotic Agents tenure.

Just to be clear, if ██████████ could have gotten clean from methamphetamine and chosen a different path, I would be one of his biggest fans. I love to see addicts (even those who were dealers) turn their lives around and help others to do the same; however, that is not the case here - at least not at this point.

We will continue to do our job in arresting these individuals, but it is cases like these that seem to support the fact that the justice system is failing the people of Monroe County.

When I came into office in 2020, we inherited a methamphetamine epidemic in this county. I asked my head of narcotics at that time about the number of people he estimated to be on methamphetamine out of our 36,000 citizens. He stated firmly, "about 10,000". I admit that I did not believe him. It could not have gotten that bad. Now after 5 years in office, I am seeing what he was seeing.

I don't know what the answer is Y'all, other than that we all truly find Jesus, but we have got to get tougher sentences on those who are making their living selling this stuff to our family members.
End of Rant.

Have a blessed and safe week.
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