

FREEDOM FROM RELIGION *foundation*

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

April 17, 2025

SENT VIA EMAIL & U.S. MAIL: scott.turner@hud.gov

Secretary Scott Turner
U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development
451 7th St., SW
Washington, DC 20410

Re: Easter and Passover closing announcement sent to HUD employees

Dear Secretary Turner:

I am writing on behalf of the Freedom From Religion Foundation (FFRF) to object to an overtly religious message sent to Department of Housing and Urban Development staff announcing HUD's official observance of Easter and Passover. FFRF is a national nonprofit organization with over 42,000 members across the country, including members in Washington, DC. 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 HUD employee reports that on April 16, 2025 your office sent an email to all staff announcing that HUD would be closing early on Good Friday, April 18, "in recognition of" Easter and Passover. Further, the email contained overtly religious messaging:

Early Release for Easter and Passover HUD Staff,

On behalf of Secretary Scott Turner, I'm excited to announce there will be a four-hour early release on Friday, April 18, 2025 in recognition of Easter and Passover this weekend.

Secretary Turner encourages our HUD workforce to reflect with family and friends as they break bread and celebrate the gift of freedom.

America's founding fathers proclaimed that all men are endowed by their creator with the right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness — this declaration rang true as the Jews fled Egypt and found freedom in the Holy Land, and it rang true once again when Jesus broke bread and drank wine with his disciples showing that sacrifice can truly change the world.

We go into this holy weekend with freedoms that the world has never known, and I hope that everyone at HUD takes a moment to recognize what a privilege it is to live in a country that puts her citizens first. [. . .]

Thank you for your service and God Bless, Andrew Hughes Chief of Staff

We are informed that the email “has made staff extremely uncomfortable.” Additionally, our complainant states the email made them feel “less than,” as if they are “not valued as much because [they] choose not to participate in religion.”

We ask that HUD reverse this decision and refrain from officially observing religious holidays going forward. Easter and Passover are not federal holidays, and these holidays hold significance only for people who practice Christianity or Judaism. It is inappropriate and unconstitutional for a government agency to close in observance of a Christian or Jewish holy day and use official communications channels to promote religion to employees.

It is a basic constitutional principle that the government cannot show favoritism toward religion. The First Amendment’s Establishment Clause requires that the government remain neutral between religions, and between religion and nonreligion. 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).

It is needlessly divisive for HUD to close its offices early to recognize specific religions’ holidays. Instead, HUD should close when there are secular reasons to do so and not because it wishes to support preferred religious observances. By closing early for Easter and Passover, and sending an overtly religious email to employees, HUD signals clear favoritism for religion over nonreligion, which is unconstitutional.

As a matter of policy, HUD should remain open on Good Friday to continue to provide its valuable services to all Americans. By closing early, HUD denies access to those who do not observe Good Friday, Easter, or Passover and may need assistance as they would on any other Friday. Nearly 30 percent of adult Americans are religiously unaffiliated.¹

To avoid further Establishment Clause concerns and out of respect for the diversity of the nation, we ask that HUD refrain from closing its doors “in recognition of” Easter, Passover or any other solely religious holiday. Thank you for your time and attention.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Samantha F. Lawrence". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Samantha" being the most prominent part.

Samantha F. Lawrence
Staff Attorney
Freedom From Religion Foundation

Enclosure

¹ 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/>.

On behalf of Secretary Scott Turner, I'm excited to announce there will be a four-hour early release [on Friday, April 18, 2025](#) in recognition of Easter and Passover this weekend.

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