

# FREEDOM FROM RELIGION *foundation*

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

July 7, 2025

**SENT VIA FAX & U.S. MAIL: (512) 475-2576**

The Honorable Greg Abbott  
Governor of Texas  
State Capitol  
P.O. Box 12428  
Austin, TX 78711

Re: “Day of Prayer” Proclamation in response to historic flooding

Dear Governor Abbott:

We are writing on behalf of the Freedom From Religion Foundation (FFRF) and our Texas membership to object to your recent proclamation calling for a Day of Prayer in response to the flooding in Texas. FFRF is a nationwide nonprofit organization with more than 42,000 members across the country, including 1,800 members and a local chapter in Texas. FFRF’s purposes are to protect the constitutional separation between state and church and to educate the public on matters related to nontheism.

This past weekend, Central Texas experienced catastrophic flooding that displaced residents, damaged infrastructure, and endangered lives. During a press conference in response to the disaster, you focused on praising your administration’s efforts, thanking President Trump and the White House, and repeatedly encouraging Texans to pray.<sup>1</sup>

“Prayer matters,” you said. Prayers “could have been the reason why water stopped rising.” You continued, “Those prayers are answered in so many ways. ... All we know is that prayer does work. Your prayers have made a difference. ... We thank God almighty. God has blessed Texas and will continue to bless our great state.”

On July 5, you followed with an official proclamation declaring Sunday, July 6, 2025, as a statewide day of prayer: “In times of loss, we turn to God for comfort, healing, and strength. I urge every Texan to join me in prayer this Sunday—for the lives lost, for those still missing, for the recovery of our communities, and for the safety of those on the front lines.”

We nonreligious Americans are likewise alarmed over the devastation and horrific loss of life in Texas. Your prayer proclamation does nothing to help those currently

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<sup>1</sup> <https://bit.ly/4eMQDyH>.

suffering or prevent similar devastation in the future. As governor, you have many tools to actually help prepare for weather-related disasters, and you should use these tools rather than using your office and state resources to promote your personal religious beliefs. Your proclamation excludes many citizens who do not believe in a deity, much less one who answers prayer. It also constitutes inappropriate promotion of religion by the highest executive in the state. We ask that you refrain from making ineffective and exclusionary proclamations, and instead take real, meaningful actions to protect Texans.

The Establishment Clause of the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution wisely prohibits government sponsorship of religious messages. The Supreme Court has said time and again that the “First Amendment 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). By issuing a proclamation calling on Texans to pray, you abridge your duty to remain neutral and to respect the freedom of conscience of all your citizens. Whether to pray, and whether to believe in a god who answers prayer, is an intensely personal decision protected under our First Amendment as a matter of conscience.

Even if this proclamation is intended to include those of non-Christian faiths, it emphatically excludes the 26 percent of Texans who are atheist, agnostic or “nothing in particular.”<sup>2</sup> Any prayer proclamation “sends the ancillary message to . . . nonadherents ‘that they are outsiders, not full members of the political community, and an accompanying message to adherents that they are insiders, favored members of the political community.’” *Santa Fe Indep. Sch. Dist. v. Doe*, 530 U.S. 290, 309-310 (2000) (quoting *Lynch v. Donnelly*, 465 U.S. 668, 688 (O’Connor, J., concurring)).

The separation between state and church is one of the most fundamental principles of our system of government. The Supreme Court has specifically stated, “If there is any fixed star in our constitutional constellation, it is that **no official, high or petty, can prescribe what shall be orthodox in politics, nationalism, religion, or other matters of opinion or force citizens to confess by word or act their faith therein.**” *West Virginia Board of Education v. Barnette*, 319 U.S. 624, 642 (1943) (emphasis added). When the government urges its citizens to pray, reasonable citizens will interpret this as government favoritism of religion.

During times of crisis, citizens look for leadership. You were elected governor, not preacher. People look to you for civic leadership, not religious support. They may decide to turn to a church, but the state may not turn into a church. Using official state resources and the power of your office to ask citizens to pray is a misuse of

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.pewresearch.org/religious-landscape-study/state/texas/>.

your secular civil authority. Instead you should be informing Texans about what they might do to actually help. It is incumbent on the governor to impart secular advice, not religion.

In conclusion, we ask that you, as governor of Texas, remain cognizant that you have taken an oath to uphold and defend the U.S. Constitution, an entirely godless and secular document, and are charged with great responsibility over citizens, including those citizens who may not share your personal religious viewpoints. Leaving religion as a private matter for private citizens is the wisest public policy. Observing a strict separation of church and state offends no one and honors the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution.

Very truly,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Annie Laurie Gaylor Dan Barker". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Annie Laurie Gaylor & Dan Barker  
Co-Presidents

ALG/DB:cal