

# FREEDOM FROM RELIGION *foundation*

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May 5, 2026

**SENT VIA EMAIL & U.S. MAIL: [t.nichols@drewcountysheriff.com](mailto:t.nichols@drewcountysheriff.com)**

Sheriff Tim Nichols  
Drew County Sheriff's Office  
210 S. Main St.  
Monticello, AR 71655

Re: Unconstitutional promotion of religion by detention center

Dear Sheriff Nichols:

I am writing on behalf of the Freedom From Religion Foundation (FFRF) regarding a constitutional concern involving the Drew County Sheriff's Office. FFRF is a national nonprofit organization with over 41,000 members across the country, including members and a chapter in Arkansas. Our purposes are to protect the constitutional principle of separation between state and church, and to educate the public on matters relating to nontheism.

We've received a report that the Drew County Sheriff's Office has been baptising Drew County Detention Facility inmates. According to a March 12, 2026 post from the official Sheriff's Office Facebook page:

In 2023 we started having Church Services and Bible Studies within the Drew County Detention Facility. From 2023 until 2025 we had witnessed 14 detainees and State Inmates dedicate their lives to Christ while making a public profession through Baptism. As of today, March 9, 2026 we have now witnessed 27!

I am very proud of these 13 men and women (many I have known for years and even watched grow up) who made that public profession today at Pauline Baptist Church. While the Devil tried to do his best to ruin the day we would not allow that to happen. He made cuffs not want to come off and he even tried locking the rear doors on the transport van where detainees couldn't get out to be baptized but we made sure to help fulfill God's plan and we got them there.

I want to thank all of those who come and witness to these men and women and to our staff for making it work!

God is at work,

Sheriff Tim Nichols

In order to comply with the First Amendment, we ask that the Sheriff's Office cease unconstitutionally encouraging or coercing inmates to participate in religious exercise or convert and refrain from promoting religion on its official social media accounts. While the Sheriff's Office may reasonably accommodate inmates' religious practices, it may not "help fulfill God's plan" or otherwise favor religion.

The First Amendment's Establishment Clause prohibits the government from taking action that promotes, favors, or coerces individuals to participate in religion. The First Amendment mandates government neutrality between religions, and between religion and nonreligion. *McCreary Cnty., Ky. v. ACLU of Ky.*, 545 U.S. 844, 860 (2005). It is commendable for the Sheriff's Office and county detention facility to facilitate inmates freely exercising their chosen religious beliefs, but it is coercive for the Sheriff's Office and Detention Facility to organize, participate in, or promote religion and religious exercises, such as baptisms, in ways that make it appear the government sponsors the religious exercise and is encouraging inmates to convert to Christianity. By organizing, hosting, and promoting inmate baptisms and celebrating inmates' conversions to Christianity on its official social media, the Sheriff's Office is unconstitutionally favoring religion over nonreligion, and Christianity over all other faiths.

Further, a county detention facility is an inherently coercive environment and inmates and detainees are literally a captive audience. When the Sheriff's Office entangles itself with religion and makes it clear that it's encouraging inmates to convert to Christianity, inmates will no doubt feel pressured to convert and participate in religious activities in order to be seen as cooperative and well behaved. Inmates and detainees who are aware of the Sheriff's Office's promotion of Christianity will not genuinely feel free to refuse to participate in its religious activities. This is constitutionally impermissible.

We hope you agree that law enforcement must be even-handed and avoid any appearance of bias toward some citizens, and hostility toward others. The Sheriff's Office and detention facility employees can practice their personal religion any way they wish when acting in their personal capacities. However, they are not permitted to use the machinery of the government, and taxpayer money, to promote their personal religion to inmates or the wider community. The Sheriff's Office's promotion of religious activity needlessly marginalizes those who are among the 38 percent of Americans who are non-Christians, including the nearly one in three adult Americans who are religiously unaffiliated.<sup>1</sup>

In order to comply with the First Amendment and to protect the rights of detainees held in the Drew County Detention Facility, we ask that the Sheriff's Office cease promoting religion within the detention facility and over its official social media channels. The Sheriff's Office cannot constitutionally encourage or promote inmates converting to Christianity or participating in religious exercise. Please inform us in writing of the steps being taken to address this matter so that we may inform our complainant. Thank you for your time and attention.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Samantha F. Lawrence". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Samantha F. Lawrence  
*Staff Attorney*  
*Freedom From Religion Foundation*

Enclosure

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<sup>1</sup> Pew Research Center (2024), <http://bit.ly/3W6Cl3m>.

## **Message from Tim Nichols**

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