

# FREEDOM FROM RELIGION *foundation*

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**SENT VIA EMAIL & U.S. MAIL: cole.stanley@amarillo.gov, tim.reid@amarillo.gov, don.tippis@amarillo.gov, david.prescott@amarillo.gov, les.simpson@amarillo.gov**

Mayor Cole Stanley  
City of Amarillo  
P.O. Box 1971  
Amarillo, TX 79105

Re: Unconstitutional and divisive Ten Commandments display

Dear Mayor Stanley and City Council members:

I am writing on behalf of the Freedom From Religion Foundation (FFRF) regarding the Ten Commandments monument recently approved and unveiled in front of the Amarillo City Hall building. FFRF is a national nonprofit organization with more than 41,000 members across the country, including 1,800 members and a chapter in Texas. 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 Amarillo resident has reported that the city recently installed a Ten Commandments monument in front of city hall. Although city officials have attempted to characterize the display as a neutral acknowledgment of history, morality, or legal tradition, the remarks made by city leaders and organizers during the monument's unveiling reveal its true purpose.

At the dedication ceremony, organizers and officials repeatedly described the monument as representing the city's religious identity and Christian beliefs. Monument coordinator Trent Morgan declared that "all laws are based on a moral code and they come from the Bible," and stated that the monument reflects "who we are as a people."<sup>1</sup> He further explained that the purpose of the display was to encourage future generations to believe in God and understand that they were created "in His image." During the ceremony, attendees prayed over the city and proclaimed that Amarillo was being "claimed . . . for the Lord."<sup>2</sup>

These statements make clear that the monument is not a historical marker, but rather a government-sponsored religious display intended to promote Christian theology and religious devotion. The city compounded this constitutional violation by hosting and participating in a religious dedication ceremony on government property.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.newschannel10.com/2026/05/27/amarillo-installs-ten-commandments-monument-city-property/>.

<sup>2</sup> <https://amarillotribune.org/2026/05/27/10-commandments-monument-unveiled-at-city-hall/>.

Far from serving a neutral historical purpose, the monument's approval, presentation and unveiling demonstrate a coordinated governmental effort to promote a particular religious viewpoint.

We write to inform the city that it cannot display the Ten Commandments on government property. Displaying the Ten Commandments in front of city hall is not only an unconstitutional display of favoritism toward religion, it needlessly marginalizes and excludes city residents who do not share the religious beliefs that the Ten Commandments embody and represent.

Claims that the Ten Commandments reflect the historical foundations of American law are historically inaccurate. The United States was founded on secular legal principles derived primarily from English common law, Enlightenment philosophy, and classical sources, not biblical mandates. The Constitution makes no reference to the Ten Commandments, biblical law, or Christianity, and expressly prohibits religious tests for public office. Many of the Commandments are purely religious directives, including prohibitions on worshiping other gods, making graven images, taking the Lord's name in vain, and observing the Sabbath. These provisions have no analogue in American law and are constitutionally barred from enforcement. Their inclusion in a government display underscores the religious, not historical, nature of the monument.

Installing new Ten Commandments displays on city property violates the First Amendment's Establishment Clause, despite the County's attempt to use "history" as a pretext for the display. In *McCreary County v. ACLU*, 545 U.S. 844 (2005), the Supreme Court ruled that displays of the Ten Commandments in two Kentucky courthouses violated the Constitution. The Court discussed at length the requirement of government neutrality on matters of religion. The Court said, "The touchstone for our analysis is the principle that the 'First Amendment mandates governmental neutrality between religion and religion, and between religion and nonreligion.'" *Id.* at 860 (quoting *Epperson v. Arkansas*, 393 U.S. 97, 104 (1968)); *see also* *Everson v. Bd. of Educ. of Ewing*, 330 U.S. 1, 15–16 (1947); *Wallace v. Jaffree*, 472 U.S. 38, 53 (1985).

The religious message of the Ten Commandments is obvious. As the Supreme Court explained in *McCreary*:

[The Ten Commandments] proclaim the existence of a monotheistic god (no other gods). They regulate details of religious obligation (no graven images, no sabbath breaking, no vain oath swearing). And they unmistakably rest even the universally accepted prohibitions (as against murder, theft, and the like) on the sanction of the divinity proclaimed at the beginning of the text.

545 U.S. 844, 868. The Court went on to say:

The point is simply that the original text viewed in its entirety is an unmistakably religious statement dealing with religious obligations and with morality subject to religious sanction.

*Id.* at 869. When a government body takes the initiative to display a religious text on government property, it demonstrates a plain and undeniable preference for religion over nonreligion, and for

those religions which subscribe to the Ten Commandments above all other faiths, and for those Christian sects who believe in the particular chosen version of the Ten Commandments over other denominations, whose versions may differ.

Other modern Ten Commandments displays have been struck down by federal courts. *See, e.g., Felix v. City of Bloomfield*, 841 F.3d 848 (10th Cir. 2016), *cert. denied*, 138 S.Ct. 357; *ACLU of Ohio Found. v. Deweese*, 633 F.3d 424 (6th Cir. 2011), *cert. denied*, 131 S.Ct. 368; *Green v. Haskell Cty. Bd. of Com'rs*, 568 F.3d 784 (10th Cir. 2009), *cert. denied*, 130 S.Ct. 1687.

This display is not like the one in *Van Orden v. Perry* that was allowed to stand. 545 U.S. 677 (2005). From the outset in *Van Orden*, Justice Breyer, whose opinion is controlling, called the display a “borderline case.” *Id.* at 700. Given the monument had existed for 40 years before the case commenced and its inclusion as one of many monuments at the Texas Capitol, he found it did not violate the Establishment Clause. He explained that a modern installation would not receive the same validation:

And, in today’s world, in a Nation of so many different religious and comparable nonreligious fundamental beliefs, a more contemporary state effort to focus attention upon a religious text is certainly likely to prove divisive in a way that this longstanding, pre-existing monument has not.

*Id.* at 703.

Finally, as a matter of policy, the city should cease displaying the Ten Commandments. The First Commandment alone makes it obvious why the Ten Commandments should not be posted on government property. The government has no business telling residents which god they must have, how many gods they must have, or that they must have any god at all. Doing so needlessly excludes and marginalizes residents 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>3</sup>

Out of respect for the Constitution and the rights of conscience of Amarillo’s residents, we ask that the Ten Commandments display be removed immediately. Please respond in writing with the steps being taken to address this matter. Thank you for your time and attention.

Sincerely,



Christopher Line  
*Legal Counsel*  
*Freedom From Religion Foundation*

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