

FREEDOM FROM RELIGION *foundation*

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August 10, 2026

SENT VIA EMAIL & U.S. MAIL: paul.coble@ncleg.gov

Paul Y. Coble
Legislative Services Officer
North Carolina General Assembly Legislative Services Office
16 W. Jones St., Rm. 2129
Raleigh, NC 27601

Re: Unconstitutional religious favoritism in Capitol monument

Dear Legislative Services Officer Coble:

We are writing on behalf of the Freedom From Religion Foundation (FFRF) regarding an unconstitutional plan to display a Billy Graham monument on North Carolina State Capitol grounds. As a national nonprofit organization with over 41,000 members across the country, FFRF represents nearly 1,000 North Carolinian members as well as a North Carolina chapter. 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 understand that the North Carolina General Assembly passed a state budget bill that included funding for a monument honoring Reverend William Franklin “Billy” Graham, Jr. There was no chance for public input or debate about the monument.

Currently, the North Carolina Capitol grounds feature monuments relating to the world wars, the Vietnam War, prominent presidents or those from the state, and governors of North Carolina; all are included for secular reasons. A statue of Billy Graham can have no secular purpose, and should not be placed at the seat of state government.

We ask that the Legislative Services Office use its discretion to refrain from using official government resources to promote a divisive religious figure and honor a single faith’s leader.

Although remarks by those who proposed the monument say that this monument would be to “honor those people who have done great things for the people of this state,” the fact is that Graham lived his life in service to his evangelical Christian religion, and the bible that he believed was an infallible reference manual. He was known as a soul-winner and lauded as a “Christian superstar preacher.” What influence he had on North Carolina was purely religious, not civic in nature, and that religious influence was uniformly regressive. While it would be appropriate for evangelical Christian institutions to honor him with a statue or memorial on private property, it is inappropriate for the state of North Carolina to do so.

Graham’s career was devoted to revivals, Christian conversions, hellfire preaching and the insertion of his brand of religion into what is supposed to be a secular country governed by a godless Constitution barring establishment of religion or governmental preference for religion. Graham notably lobbied Congress to pass a law declaring an annual National Day of Prayer, saying he wanted to “see the leaders of our

country kneeling before almighty God in prayer.”¹ Unfortunately, Congress, in 1952 (with minor amendment in 1988), did his bidding, enacting an unconstitutional law enjoining that “the President shall issue each year a proclamation designating the first Thursday in May as a National Day of Prayer on which the people of the United States may turn to God in prayer and meditation, at churches, in groups, and as individuals.” This law enacted at Graham’s behest has entangled religion and government, spawned countless inappropriate prayer breakfasts, prayerful governmental events and prayer resolutions at all levels of government, sending for generations a message that evangelical Christians are “insiders” and non-Christians and the nonreligious are “outsiders.”

Graham had a checkered history that included antisemitism, disdain for atheists and other alienating and divisive views. Graham was on the wrong side of the leading issues of his time. The day after Martin Luther King Jr. wrote his letter from the Birmingham Jail — a letter addressed to white religious leaders like Graham who were doing little else other than “mouth[ing] pious irrelevancies and sanctimonious trivialities” — Graham mouthed a few more, arguing that King should “put the brakes on a little bit.”² A released Watergate tape from 1972 caught Graham telling President Nixon that Jews had a “stranglehold” on the news.³

Our freethinking membership feels estranged as citizens of North Carolina when the leaders of the state choose this outsized honor for Graham, especially given his years of advice columns deriding the nonreligious. In a column published on Aug. 7, 2010, by the Billy Graham Evangelical Association, a writer asked: “The kindest, most thoughtful person I know says she’s an atheist and doesn’t even believe in God. I always thought we needed to believe in God before we’d behave like she does, but I guess this isn’t necessarily true, is it?” Graham’s reply was a slap in the face of all freethinkers. He said, “She’s not this way because she’s an atheist. In fact, she’s this way in spite of her atheism — because a true atheist has no real reason to believe in right and wrong, or to behave sacrificially toward others.”⁴

Graham vociferously opposed gay rights and marriage equality, saying that “we traffic in homosexuality at the peril of our spiritual welfare.”⁵ Even in his 90s, Graham wrote a full-page ad appearing in several North Carolina newspapers “to urge my fellow North Carolinians to vote FOR the marriage amendment”⁶ in May 2012, which passed, banning gay marriage until it was later nullified. He once suggested, then withdrew the suggestion that AIDS could be a “judgment” from God.⁷ Even in 1993, Graham’s views offended public opinion so much that, after once suggesting that AIDS could be a “judgment” from God,⁸ he was forced to withdraw the remarks. He belonged to a denomination that refused to ordain women,⁹ including his own daughter who defied the convention against preaching. The “Billy Graham” rule directing a man not to be alone with a woman other than his wife continues to influence evangelicals.¹⁰

Billy Graham believed fervently in Christianity and people listened to him. But that is not worthy of a spot on the North Carolina Capitol grounds, which must serve and welcome all citizens, whether

¹ Billy Graham and the National Day of Prayer, The Billy Graham Library, May 4, 2020, <https://billygrahamlibrary.org/blog-billy-graham-and-the-national-day-of-prayer/>.

² Kristin Butler, A Tale of Two Preachers, American Experience, May 12, 2021, <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americalexperience/features/billy-graham-tale-two-preachers/>.

³ Los Angeles Times, March 2, 2002, <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-2002-mar-02-mn-30761-story.html>.

⁴ Billy Graham, “My Answer,” Billy Graham Evangelistic Association, <https://billygraham.org/answers/the-kindest-most-thoughtful-person-i-know-says-shes-an-atheist-and-doesnt-even-believe-in-god>.

⁵ John Paul Brammer, Billy Graham Leaves Painful Legacy for LGBTQ People, NBC News, Feb. 22, 2018, <https://www.nbcnews.com/feature/nbc-out/billy-graham-leaves-painful-legacy-lgbtq-people-n850031>.

⁶ Michael Foust, In Ads, Billy Graham Backs Marriage Amendments, Baptist Press, May 3, 2012, <https://www.baptistpress.com/resource-library/news/in-ads-billy-graham-backs-nc-marriage-amend/>.

⁷ Deseret News, Graham Apologizes for AIDS Comment, Oct. 10, 1993, <https://www.deseret.com/1993/10/10/19070273/graham-apologizes-for-aids-comment/>.

⁸ *Id.*

⁹ Pat Gilliland, Pastor Gets Graham Kin Off Agenda, The Oklahoman, Jan. 13, 1993, <https://bit.ly/4fYnz8j>.

¹⁰ Billy Graham, What’s “the Billy Graham Rule?,” Billy Graham Evangelical Association, <https://billygraham.org/articles/the-modesto-manifesto-a-declaration-of-biblical-integrity>.

Christian, non-Christian, atheist or LGBTQ. Graham in his own way sought to undo the only sure way to guarantee freedom of religion: a government free from religion. Giving him this unearned honor excludes those who are among the 31 percent of North Carolinians who are non-Christians, including the 26 percent of adult North Carolinians who are religiously unaffiliated.¹¹

We ask that the North Carolina Legislative Services Office refrain from erecting a monument to a divisive religious figure. The state should keep its capitol grounds secular. Thank you for your time and attention.

Sincerely,

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

Annie Laurie Gaylor & Dan Barker
Co-presidents

ALG/DB:crg

¹¹ Pew Research Center (2024): <https://www.pewresearch.org/religious-landscape-study/state/north-carolina/>.