

# FREEDOM FROM RELIGION *foundation*

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December 29, 2016

SENT VIA MAIL & FACSIMILE: (502) 564-2517

Matt Bevin  
Office of the Governor  
700 Capitol Avenue, Suite 100  
Frankfort KY 40601

## **Re: Request to rescind unconstitutional (and duplicative) “year of the bible” proclamation”**

Dear Governor Bevin:

We are writing on behalf of the Freedom From Religion Foundation’s 25,500 members, including more than 200 members in Kentucky, and a chapter, FFRF Kentucky, who are dismayed, even shocked, that you have issued, for a puzzling second year in a row, a proclamation declaring the “Year of the Bible” in Kentucky.

This proclamation is in direct support of a Christian bible-reading marathon declared by the Kentucky Prayer Focus, a Christian clergy group, and was written by a state representative who is also a Baptist minister. The Christian-biased, sectarian nature of the proclamation is incontestable.

It is highly inappropriate for the highest secular office holder in the state of Kentucky, to use that office to exhort citizens to read the bible or to endorse “celebrating the bible’s significant impact on Kentucky and American institutions and culture.”

Kentucky’s state Constitution clearly guarantees that no:

Preference shall ever be given by law to any particular creed, mode of worship or system of ecclesiastical polity; nor shall any person be compelled to attend any place of worship, to contribute to the erection or maintenance of any such place, or to the salary or support of any minister or religion; . . . the civil rights, privileges or capacities of no person shall be taken away, or in anywise diminished or enlarged, on account of his belief or disbelief of any religious tenet, dogma or teaching. No human authority shall in any case whatever, control or interfere with the rights of conscience.

Under the First Amendment’s protection of freedom of conscience, the office of the governor has no business telling citizens which god to recognize, which holy book to revere or read, much less to proclaim a year of any “holy book.” Last we heard, citizens in this nation and in every state are still free to believe, or disbelieve, whatever they like

in matters of religion. Such arrogant overreaching of governmental authority is unacceptable. Imagine the uproar had you endorsed a "Year of the Koran." Or had you proclaimed that 2017 was the year of Richard Dawkins' "God Delusion." It is equally reprehensible to "bless," in your official capacity, the Christian bible and deign to instruct citizens to engage in a reading marathon.

A governor in our secular nation has no authority to determine what is "the word of God," or whether there is a "word of God." Government is forbidden by the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment from taking sides on religion. About a third of Kentuckians and citizens nationwide are non-Christian, with fully 24 percent of these Americans identifying as nonreligious (Pew Religious Landscape Study, 2015).

Most erroneous in the proclamation is the claim that "our Bill of Rights comes from" the bible. Our nation is founded not on a bible but on a secular and godless Constitution, which grants sovereignty not to a deity or a "holy book" but to "We, the People." There is no reference to God, the bible, or the Ten Commandments in the U.S. Constitution. In fact, its only references to religion are exclusionary, such as that there shall be no religious test for public office, and barring governmental establishment of religion. Your proclamation violates the spirit of the First Amendment and tramples on state citizens' right to freedom of conscience. Citizens can make up their own minds on whether to consider a book "holy" or whether to reject the very concept of a "holy book."

Nothing is more divisive than religion in the state. The founding fathers, well aware of the holy wars and holy horrors of the Inquisition, Crusades, Hundred Year War, etc., wanted no part of religion in government. As a state justice wisely warned:

"There is no such source and cause of strife, quarrel, fights, malignant opposition, persecution, and war, and all evil in the state, as religion. Let it once enter our civil affairs, our government would soon be destroyed." *Weiss v. District Board*, 44 N.W. 967, 981 (1890)(Orton, J. concurring).

Here is our message to public officials everywhere: Quit with the gratuitous religion. Get off your knees and get to work!

Very truly,

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

Dan Barker and Annie Laurie Gaylor  
FFRF Co-Presidents