

Atheist Group Threatens School District Over Use of 'In God We Trust'

An atheist group has threatened the Bentonville Public School District to not comply with Arkansas Act 911, a new law enacted which provides for the display of the National Motto, "In God We Trust," in public schools as a patriotic and historic display. Liberty Counsel has offered *pro bono* counsel and defense for the school district.

The American Atheists, founded by the late Madalyn Murray O'Hair, has issued a letter to over 260 superintendents across the state, claiming that the display is unconstitutional and threatening to file suit in federal court if the school district complies with the new law.

Act 911 requires superintendents and administration officials of all state agencies to display the "In God We Trust" motto, the flag of Arkansas and the United States flag in all classrooms, libraries and any other public building "maintained or operated by state funds." It was signed into law by Governor Hutchinson in April. As stipulated in Act 911, the "In God We Trust" displays must be purchased with private funds and donated. Pleasant Hill Baptist Church has pledged to donate "In God We Trust" signs to every Bentonville public school.

Rep. Jim Dotson said he sponsored the legislation to have American history and heritage displayed throughout Arkansas. After researching similar laws in several other states, Dotson modeled the law after Georgia's law.

"The National Motto has withstood legal challenges many times," said Mat Staver, Founder and Chairman of Liberty Counsel. "'In God We Trust' has been the Florida motto since

1868 and is part of the state seal and was adopted as the National Motto in 1956. The motto is on our currency and is not an establishment of religion,” said Staver.

Liberty Counsel is an international nonprofit, litigation, education and policy organization dedicated to advancing religious freedom, the sanctity of life and the family since 1989, by providing pro bono assistance and representation on these and related topics. {eoa}

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