

‘Free-Thinking’ Attack Town’s Atheists Nativity Display

The “freethinking” atheists at the Freedom From Religion Foundation are indirectly putting pressure on the city of Franklin, Pa., to take down a nativity scene that has long been part of the community’s Christmas display.

But, the town’s city council has decided it won’t back down, thanks in part of assistance offered by Liberty Counsel.

The issue began late last month when the city received an anonymous email demanding the city remove its nativity display in Bandstand Park. FFRF was “carbon copied” on the email, which states the display is a violation of the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment.

However, at this week’s council meeting, community leaders unanimously approved adding secular decorative items near the nativity display. Also at the meeting, Liberty Counsel offered to provide free legal assistance in support of that decision, which it says is permissible “government speech.”

“Such decorations could include Santa, reindeer, snowmen or other symbols or décor displayed in tasteful proximity to the nativity scene,” Liberty Counsel stated in a press release Thursday morning. “In addition to the city’s constitutional ‘government speech’ option under applicable Supreme Court precedent, other courts, including the Third Circuit Court of Appeals—which has jurisdiction over Pennsylvania—routinely uphold Christmas displays against legal challenge.”

Liberty Counsel has just launched its 14th annual Friend or Foe Christmas Campaign, pledging to be a “friend” to those who recognize Christmas and a “foe” to those who attempt to censor

it. The campaign educates, and if necessary litigates, to make sure Christmas and Christian themes are not censored.

Liberty Counsel also offers guidance regarding publicly and privately sponsored religious holiday displays, religious holidays in public schools and the rights of public school students in the context of religious holidays.

“Publicly-sponsored nativity scenes on public property are constitutional, especially when the display includes other secular symbols of the holiday,” Liberty Counsel Founder and Chairman Mat Staver said. “Franklin city officials quickly voted to add other appropriate decor, in order to avoid question whether the nativity scene is constitutional. We stand by the city and will offer legal counsel to any city facing threats from the FFRF or other individuals.” {eoa}