

Angry Atheists Seek Financial Pay Off for This Prayer Meeting

Acts of violence riddle communities across this nation, and while many have questioned how to stop the senseless crime, law enforcement officials in the City of Ocala, Florida, decided to engage *with* the community to try to bring an end to a spree of shootings that, within the span of just a couple of weeks, left three small children injured. And for their efforts, which included supporting a prayer vigil organized by concerned citizens to unite the community in seeking peace and justice, the City, its mayor, and its police chief have found themselves embroiled in a lawsuit filed by the Washington, American Humanist Association (AHA) and four of its members.

According to the AHA complaint, not only should the government and its officials be vilified for encouraging citizens to attend the community vigil and assist law enforcement in making the city safer for its residents, but the mayor and police chief should be forced to pay the atheist plaintiffs monetary damages for such “offensive” conduct. Availability of monetary relief against these individuals is limited to those circumstances in which they should have known that their actions would clearly violate constitutional rights. Apparently the AHA and its members believe that government officials should be well aware that working alongside members of the community to bring about peace and justice becomes an affront to liberty if prayer makes its way into those efforts. (Never mind those cases in which courts, including the United States Supreme Court, have upheld governmental prayer practices as lawful, or, equally important, the constitutional injury that would result if law enforcement officials had done as these atheists requested and *canceled* the private citizens’ vigil.)

The ACLJ is defending the City of Ocala, its mayor and its chief of police and will argue for dismissal of the claims against them, as this type of community engagement and support is precisely what law enforcement *should* be doing, and is certainly *not* justification for reaching into the pockets of these individual officials for monetary damages.