

Atheists Hungry to End Prayer Breakfast Tradition in Miss.

In the latest assault on religious freedom, atheists in Hattiesburg, Miss., are attempting to end an annual prayer breakfast.

Alliance Defending Freedom has sent a letter to Hattiesburg mayor Johnny DuPree to encourage him to continue the Mayor's Annual Prayer Breakfast despite an atheist group's false claims that the event is unconstitutional.

"Public officials should be able to recognize public prayer activities just as America's founders did," said Senior Counsel Austin R. Nimocks. "The mayor need not give in to the demands of activist groups that twist the true meaning of the **First Amendment**. He and the town of Hattiesburg are free to continue to participate in this long-revered American tradition."

The Mayor's Annual Prayer Breakfast, set for May 2, coincides with the National Day of Prayer, a yearly event in which national, state and local leaders of all faiths are invited to pray for the nation. The National Day of Prayer was created in 1952 by a joint resolution of the U.S. Congress and was signed into law by President Harry S. Truman.

The Alliance Defending Freedom letter sent Friday explains that "the United States Supreme Court has repeatedly acknowledged that presidential proclamations of thanksgiving and prayer, including the National Day of Prayer, are indeed a part of our culture and tradition and are in no way a violation of the Constitution."

The letter also notes that "historically, all governors from all 50 states, along with the president of the United States, have issued proclamations in honor of the National Day of

Prayer. There is no basis to suggest that a mayor or city council member could not do the same."

"In no way does holding the Mayor's Annual Prayer Breakfast constitute as an establishment of religion," added local counsel Sharkey Burke, one of more than 2,200 allied attorneys with Alliance Defending Freedom. "Local observances of the National Day of Prayer are constitutional and appropriate, particularly since the event simply provides all Americans an opportunity to pray voluntarily according to their own faith—and does not promote any particular religion or form of religious observance."