

# Atheists Vow to Continue Fighting for Florida Monument

Local officials in Florida this week rejected an atheist monument proposed for a courthouse lawn.

Commissioners in Levy County, along the Gulf Coast of Florida, rejected an application filed by local atheists for the placement of a 1,500-pound granite bench adorned with quotes on the courthouse lawn in Bronson.

A Ten Commandments monument is already in place, erected by a local group with county approval. The proposed atheist monument is identical to one placed last year at another courthouse in Starke, Fla., after it, too, was initially rejected.

In this case, county commissioners rejected the monument because its engraved quotes—from Thomas Jefferson, Benjamin Franklin, John Adams and American Atheists founder Madalyn Murray O'Hair, were "incomplete," according to the commission's report.

"None of the texts on the proposed monument appear to be a reproduction of the entire text of any document or person, as required in the [county] guidelines," the report states.

Charles Ray Sparrow, a member of Williston Atheists, a group of about a dozen nonbelievers that applied for the monument in January, said such objections were not raised for the Ten Commandments monument.

"It is just an excuse," he said. "We will not give up."

Sparrow said his group, established a few months ago, has contacted the national office of American Atheists to help plan their next step.

Fred Moody, Levy County coordinator, did not respond to requests for comment.

American Atheists erected the first monument to atheism on public land last June outside the Bradford County Courthouse, about 50 miles northeast of Bronson. The New Jersey-based organization has funding in place, raised from private donors, to erect additional monuments as their applications are approved.

Since the erection of the Bradford County monument, other religious minorities have sought monuments attesting to their beliefs on public land. In December, a group of Oklahoma Satanists proposed a statue of a horned god on the state capitol grounds, as did a group of Hindus, who proposed a statue of the monkey god Hanuman. Neither has been approved.

But American Atheists President David Silverman is optimistic about the eventual placement of an atheist monument in Levy County.

“It will be up to Levy County whether they want to go to court, spend hundreds of thousands of dollars, lose and get an atheist monument anyway,” he said.

---

*Copyright 2014 Religion News Service. All rights reserved. No part of this transmission may be distributed or reproduced without written permission.*