

Secular Humanists Attack Cross in Florida City Seal

Yet another local government has received a threatening letter citing separation of church and state that targets perceived religious expression in the public arena.

The city of DeLand, Fla., received a letter from Americans United for Separation of Church and State (AU) that claims an anonymous resident complained to AU about the city's official seal.

The seal dates back to 1882, when the city was incorporated. It includes the city's name, its founding date and an anchor, heart and cross that AU claims is a representation of faith, hope and charity. As far as the city is aware, this is the first complaint it has ever received about the seal in its 131-year history.

The American Center for Law and Justice (ACLJ) sent a letter to city officials explaining that the city's seal is constitutional. The letter notes similarities between DeLand's seal and other city seals or insignias that have been upheld in court. We included one court's observation that "the people of the United States did not adopt the Bill of Rights in order to strip the public square of every last shred of public piety. The notion that the First Amendment commands a brooding and pervasive devotion to the secular ... is a notion that simply perverts our history."

The ACLJ's letter also notes that the seal's 131-year history is strong evidence of its constitutionality in light of Supreme Court precedent that accords great weight to the longstanding nature of government displays. The ACLJ encouraged the city to maintain its official seal as is and told the city attorney and city manager that the organization

is available to discuss how it may be of assistance in the defense of the city's seal in the event that a lawsuit is filed challenging it.

This is yet another unfortunate example of a local government being threatened based upon the kind of extreme interpretation of the First Amendment's Establishment Clause that the Supreme Court has repeatedly rejected.