



Secular Maryland

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OPPOSE - HB 899

Higher Education - Scholarship Program - Eagle Scout and Girl Scout Gold Award Recipients

Dear Chair McIntosh, Vice-Chair Chang, and Members of the Appropriations Committee,

Secular Maryland objects to this proposed \$2,000 college tuition gift by the state to anyone who acquired a Boy Scouts of America Eagle badge because BSA refuses membership to both youths and adult leaders who do not believe in God. There are many youth organizations, yet this bill singles out two youth organizations by name for a tuition subsidy. A tuition subsidy given to a particular theist only membership youth program implies state government support for invidious discrimination against non-theist residents.

All Scouting program units must be chartered to an organization. Chartered organizations own and operate their unit(s) while simultaneously committing themselves to follow the national Boy Scouts of America (BSA) policies. Scouting programs also require individual membership for full participation. Membership applications are processed at BSA headquarters. BSA is legally a private organization that has complete discretion to grant/deny/revoke membership on any basis whatsoever and without explanation. The chartered organization cannot veto or overrule national BSA membership and policy decisions. Boy Scouts of America policy requires Scouting program leaders to compel all youth members to swear an oath of duty to God. Participation in BSA's Scouting program thus conflicts with the religious liberty of youth and adult leaders who disagree with the public theistic belief self-expression mandate.

The interdenominational BSA Scouting program provides specific guidance on how to be "reverent" and fulfill one's "duty to God." They include these: "Attend the church,

synagogue, mosque or other religious organization of your choice." "Practice your religion as you are taught." "Pray to God or meditate reverently each day." "With your religious leader, discuss and write down two things you think will help you draw nearer to God. Do these things." "[L]ead your patrol in saying grace at the meals.

An official Boy Scouts of America policy statement follows:

Boy Scouts of America believes that no member can grow into the best kind of citizen without recognizing an obligation to God. Accordingly, youth members and adult volunteer leaders of Boy Scouts of America obligate themselves to do their duty to God and be reverent as embodied in the Scout Oath and the Scout Law. Leaders also must subscribe to the Declaration of Religious Principle. Because of its views concerning the duty to God, Boy Scouts of America believes that an atheist or agnostic is not an appropriate role model of the Scout Oath and Law for adolescent boys. Because of Scouting's methods and beliefs, Scouting does not accept atheists and agnostics as members or adult volunteer leaders.

Respectfully,
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