



AMERICAN ATHEISTS

March 11, 2025

The Honorable Del. Joseline A. Pena-Melnyk
Chair, House Health and Government Operations
6 Bladen Street
Annapolis, Maryland 21404

Re: OPPOSE HB 1472, An Unconstitutional Attempt to Undermine Religious Freedom

Dear Chairperson Pena-Melnyk and Members of the House Health and Government Operations Committee:

As a Maryland resident and Director of Grassroots Organizing & Advocacy for American Atheists, which has nearly 1,100 constituents in Maryland, I write in opposition to HB 1472, an unconstitutional measure that would install a Ten Commandments monument at the Maryland State House. This proposal is a needless use of legislative time and taxpayer dollars that will only result in expensive litigation for the state. We urge you to defend the religious freedom of all Marylanders by rejecting this misguided bill.

American Atheists is a national civil rights organization that works to achieve religious equality for all Americans by protecting what Thomas Jefferson called the “wall of separation” between government and religion created by the First Amendment. We strive to create an environment where atheists are accepted as members of our nation’s communities and where bigotry against our community is seen as abhorrent and unacceptable. We promote understanding of atheists through education, outreach, and community-building, and work to end the stigma associated with being an atheist in America. American Atheists believe that no one should be coercively subjected to religious speech by the government.

Lawmakers across the country have tried and failed to enact laws similar to HB 1472 for decades. These efforts have sparked numerous lawsuits, costing states hundreds of millions of dollars of taxpayer money. In every instance, courts have ruled that placement of Ten Commandments monuments on public land violates the Constitution and ordered the monuments be removed. Such religious displays on public property inherently violate the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment, which provides: “Congress shall make no law respecting the establishment of religion.” This means that religion and government must remain separate to ensure all Americans’ religious beliefs are respected; the government may not favor one religion over another or elevate religious belief over nonbelief without

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violating the fundamental right to religious freedom.¹ Courts have found that Ten Commandment monuments on public land are a textbook example of the government favoring a specific religious perspective to the detriment of all other perspectives because, based on the very nature of the displays and their physical and historical context, there is “no question that the statute or activity was motivated wholly by religious considerations.”²

If Maryland wants to place materials with religious significance on public property in a manner that aligns with the Constitution, it already has the ability to do so without passing HB 1472 — but only so long as all other religious perspectives are allowed equal access to public land. If the state intends to place religious monuments on public property as an explicit endorsement of religion, HB 1472 will do nothing to further that goal as such placements will continue to violate the First Amendment and result in costly legal battles.

This measure is nothing more than political pandering that will unnecessarily cost the state a significant amount of taxpayer money. It shows a blatant disregard for the Constitution and our nation’s long history and tradition of religious liberty for all. If enacted, Maryland citizens will be forced to foot the bill for the inevitable easily avoidable litigation that would follow HB 1472’s passage. We urge you to stand up for religious freedom by rejecting this bill.

Should you have any questions regarding American Atheists’ opposition to HB 1472, please contact Victoria Anderson, State Policy Counsel for American Atheists, at vanderson@atheists.org.

Sincerely,



Samantha McGuire
Director of Grassroots Organizing & Advocacy
American Atheists

¹ *Epperson v. Arkansas*, 393 U.S. 97, 103-104 (1968) (the First Amendment requirement that the government be neutral “between religion and religion, and between religion and nonreligion” is “rooted in the foundation soil of our Nation”).

² *Lynch v. Donnelly*, 465 U.S. 668, 680 (1984).