

May 7, 2010

Dr. Robert Groves  
Director  
U.S. Census Bureau  
4600 Silver Hill Road  
Washington, DC 20233

Dr. Groves,

As directors of organizations committed to the rights of humanists, atheists, and other freethinkers, a number of us have received complaints from persons who were hired by the U.S. Census or sought Federal employment as Census workers. They complain that they were asked to take a religious oath that ends in “so help me God.”

We, the undersigned, write to urge you to remove such superfluous and divisive language from the oath you administer. As it stands this practice leads hires and applicants to believe that Census has a religious test for public office in violation of U.S. Constitution, Article VI, clause: “no religious Test shall ever be required as a Qualification to any Office or public Trust under the United States.” The oath is harmful to those who do not believe in a monotheist god because it implies that the non-believer cannot get the job without taking the oath or would lose his or her job if their lack of religious belief were discovered by management. Moreover, the oath has the effect of stigmatizing non-monotheists as outsiders.

The Census does not *require* the use of phrase “so help me God” as seen in the Census’ *Guide for Training Enumeration*, which states that the “so help me God” phrase is not required and may be crossed out. Notwithstanding that the cross-out option is available, by having to ask in front of Census officials and other new hires with whom they would be working in the future, those who object to this religious practice expose themselves to religion-based prejudice going forward. Consequently, the oath has a substantial coercive effect upon Census applicants. Accordingly, we respectfully request “so help me God” be deleted from the oath administered by Census

Please inform us by June 1, 2010, of any action you intend to take to make Census’ oath comply with the constitutional requirement for religious neutrality.

Sincerely yours,

Edward Buckner, President, American Atheists  
Katharine Archibald, Executive Director, American Ethical Union  
David Niose, President, American Humanist Association  
Stuart Bechman, President, Atheist Alliance International  
Amanda Metskas, Executive Director, Camp Quest  
Tom Flynn, Executive Director, Council for Secular Humanism  
Dan Barker, Co-President, Freedom From Religion Foundation  
Warren Wolf, President, Institute for Humanist Studies  
Matt Cherry, Director, International Humanist and Ethical Union  
Jason Torpy, President, Military Association of Atheists and Freethinkers  
Herb Silverman, President, Secular Coalition for America  
Hemant Mehta, Chair, Secular Student Alliance  
Louis Altman, President, Society for Humanistic Judaism  
Fred Edwards, Director, United Coalition of Reason