

FREEDOM FROM RELIGION *foundation*

P.O. BOX 750 • MADISON, WI 53701 • (608) 256-8900 • WWW.FFRF.ORG

April 9, 2024

SENT VIA EMAIL AND U.S. MAIL: weigand.jeff@countyofdane.com

The Honorable Jeff Weigand
Dane County Board of Supervisors
210 Martin Luther King Jr Blvd #114
Madison, WI 53703

Re: Apologize for divisive religious remarks

Dear Supervisor Weigand:

We are writing on behalf of the Freedom From Religion Foundation (FFRF) to raise concerns about your continued use of our position as a Dane County supervisor to promote your personal religious beliefs. As you are aware, FFRF is a Madison-based national nonprofit organization with more than 40,000 members across the country, including more than 1,900 members in Wisconsin, and hundreds in Dane County. We are asking that you apologize for your remarks on April 4 regarding the homeless and “sin.”

We previously wrote you on July 13, 2023,¹ about our concerns about your gratuitous attacks on nonreligious citizens. You had stated publicly that “I think unfortunately... there's a lot of people that resent God, and they're trying to stick their nose and just stick their finger in His face. And they're doing things that they know are wrong. And it's in direct opposition to Him, which is really unfortunate.”

Now, on April 4, 2024, during a meeting of the Dane County Board, you, once again, used your position to push your personal religious beliefs in a manner that degrades others. In defending your decision to vote against granting more than \$200,000 of funding to Porchlight to care for the homeless, you claimed that “sin” was the cause of homelessness:²

Sin is the root cause... When God created this world, there was no sin, he created a perfect world, man ruined that by sinning, and we've seen the depravity and the decline of our world ever since then. So when we talk about the root cause, if you really want to go back to why we have mental health issues, to why we have greed, to why we have people being mean to other people, it's sin. And until we address that issue, we're going to continue to see this issue of homelessness and a whole slate of other issues in our society.

It is our understanding that you later clarified that you were “referring broadly to the sinfulness of the entire human race, which fundamentalists believe stems from Adam and Eve being disobedient to God in

¹ <https://ffrf.us/3JdzjE7>

² <https://madison365.com/sin-is-the-root-cause-of-homelessness-dane-county-supervisor-says/>

the Garden of Eden.”³ You further elaborated that the county should restrict funding to those initiatives that “will hold people accountable to God’s standards.”⁴

We write to again ask that you refrain from using your position as a Dane County supervisor to promote your personal religious beliefs and biases. You are certainly free to express your religious beliefs however you like while acting in your personal capacity as a private citizen. However, you appear to be confusing your religious beliefs with your public mission. Your remarks degrade the unhoused and appear to violate Dane County ordinances. They are in fact a protected class in Dane County.⁵ We believe the only real “sins” are ignorance and cruelty, which your remarks and uncharitable vote demonstrate.

Your assertion that the county should “hold people accountable to God’s standards” shows a complete misunderstanding of your duties as a secular county board supervisor, who in fact has taken an oath of office to uphold our nation’s godless and entirely secular Constitution, whose only references to religion are exclusionary and which bars any religious test for public office, among other key provisions.⁶

Our Constitution’s Establishment Clause—which protects Americans’ religious freedom by ensuring the continued separation of religion and government—dictates that the government cannot in any way favor religion. As the Supreme Court has put it, “the First Amendment mandates governmental neutrality between religion and religion, and between religion and nonreligion.” *McCreary Cty. v. ACLU*, 545 U.S. 844, 860 (2005); *Wallace v. Jaffree*, 472 U.S. 38, 53 (1985); *Epperson v. Arkansas*, 393 U.S. 97, 104 (1968); *Everson v. Bd. of Educ. of Ewing*, 330 U.S. 1, 15–16 (1947). When a county supervisor or other government official associates their office with an exclusively Christian message, and suggests that county funding should only go to those who are “accountable to God’s standards.” they violate this essential constitutional principle.

You appear to believe Dane County is a theocracy wherein public officials are empowered to enforce a fundamentalist, biblical viewpoint, which is not the case. Finally, your remarks continue to fail to acknowledge the rights of conscience of the citizens of Dane County who are not religious — and that’s nearly half of them.

Please cease and desist your derisive, abrasive and judgmental religious statements and messages. They are needlessly divisive and unbecoming an elected official.

Very truly,



Annie Laurie Gaylor & Dan Barker

Co-presidents

ALG/DB:cal

³ *Id.*

⁴ *Id.*

⁵ Chapter 31 Fair Housing <https://www.countyofdane.com/documents/pdf/ordinances/ord031.pdf>

⁶ <https://www.prii.org/research/2020-census-of-american-religion/>