



## **Pennsylvania Ten Commandments Monument Latest Target of Atheist Group**

The Freedom From Religion Foundation has filed suit against a second Pennsylvania school district in as many weeks over a Ten Commandments monument on school property. The anti-religion attack group, which had filed a lawsuit on September 14 against the New Kensington-Arnold School District for the Ten Commandments monument displayed at its Valley High School, mounted a similar assault against the Connellsville Area School District for its Decalogue display at the Connellsville Junior High School.



Both monuments were donated by the Fraternal Order of Eagles in the late 1950s when that group was pursuing a campaign to erect such displays in communities across America. The FFRF has systematically targeted these displays over the past several years in an apparent attempt to denude America's landscape of all expressions of faith in God.

According to an FFRF press release, its complaint against the Connellsville school district "states that the continued presence of the Ten Commandments on district property is an unconstitutional advancement and endorsement of religion. The complaint also notes that the display 'lacks any secular purpose,' citing *Stone v. Graham*, a 1980 Supreme Court decision which ruled the Ten Commandments may not be posted in public school classrooms, because the 'pre-eminent purpose' for doing so 'is plainly religious in nature.'"

According to the [Associated Press](#), a nearby church offered to have the five-foot-high monument moved from the Connellsville Junior High grounds to its property, where it would be prominently displayed. "However, the lawsuit filed in U.S. District Court also seeks to prevent the monument from being displayed by the church because it's next to some school athletic fields and might be seen by students," reported AP.

Attorney Marcus B. Schneider, who is representing the plaintiffs identified as "Doe 4" and "Doe 5" in the FFRF suit (Does "1" and "2" being connected to the New Kensington-Arnold complaint), complained that moving the monument to the church would "bring district students in contact with the Ten Commandments monument. Doe 4 will attend Connellsville Area Senior High School upon completion of her studies at the junior high. If the monument is moved to the athletic fields, it is assured that she will continue to view the monument."

Matt Staver of the conservative legal advocacy group [Liberty Counsel](#) observed that the FFRF's efforts to keep the church from displaying the monument on its private property demonstrates that the atheist group's agenda has little to do with addressing supposed constitutional concerns, but instead is about obliterating "Judeo-Christianity and any kind of symbols from our history and heritage from even the sight of someone." Staver added that "whether it's on private property or not is no concern of theirs."



Written by [Dave Bohon](#) on October 3, 2012

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What's a concern of theirs is whether or not someone can even see it."

In the complaint Schneider wrote that his clients, Doe 4 and 5, feel that "the monument excludes them and others, both members of the community and visitors to the district, who do not follow the particular religion or god that the monument endorses."

The school district had attempted to appease those complaining about the monument by encasing it in a plywood box so no one could see it, but the plywood was removed on several occasions by anonymous supporters of the monument. "The indefinite covering of the highly conspicuous Ten Commandments monument has neither remedied the impermissible coercion that Plaintiffs previously endured," the complaint reads, "nor has it had the effect of squelching the message of religious endorsement that the district continues to send."

In the other Pennsylvania Ten Commandments case, the New Kensington-Arnold School District has chosen to fight back against the FFRF's intimidation. As reported by [The New American](#), "both school officials and local religious and civic leaders have stepped forward to defend their community's right to determine what it will allow in the realm of religious expression."

The FFRF itself noted that school board president Robert Pallone "wrote in March on the Facebook webpage called 'Keep the Ten Commandments at Valley High School,' that the district would not 'remove this monument without a fight.'" In addition local clergy organized a rally in front of Valley High School in support of the decision to keep the monument.

In related news, a federal judge has dismissed a lawsuit filed by the FFRF challenging a resolution passed by the Pennsylvania House of Representatives declaring 2012 as the "Year of the Bible" in the state. The resolution declared that the Holy Bible had exerted a "formative influence" on the founding of America, and encouraged the state's residents to spend the year reading through the Holy Scriptures.

However, while U.S. Middle District Judge Christopher C. Conner ruled that the lawmakers enjoyed "absolute legislative immunity" to pass the resolution, he nonetheless criticized the measure as "proselytizing and exclusionary," adding that his decision "should not be viewed as judicial endorsement for this resolution. It most certainly is not."

Wrote Conner in his ruling: "At a time when the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania faces massive public policy challenges, these resources would be far better utilized in meaningful legislative efforts for the benefit of all of the citizens of the commonwealth, regardless of their religious beliefs."



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