

# United States of America

The United States of America is a large country of around 327 million people, bordered by Canada to the north and Mexico to the south. Since the end of World War II, the US has been widely considered the most powerful nation on Earth and remains very influential globally in economic, cultural and political affairs.

Constitution and government	Education and children's rights	Family, community, society, religious courts and tribunals	Freedom of expression advocacy of humanist values
		<u>Discriminatory prominence is given to religious bodies, traditions or leaders</u>	
<u>Official symbolic deference to religion</u> <u>Anomalous discrimination by local or provincial authorities, or overseas territories</u>		<u>Localised or infrequent but recurring and widespread social marginalisation or prejudice against the non-religious</u>	
	<u>No formal discrimination in education</u>		<u>No fundamental restrictions on freedom of expression or advocacy of humanist values</u>

# Constitution and government

The United States receives a relatively good rating in this Report, in consequence of the nation's strong constitutional protections in favour of freedom of thought, religion or belief and freedom of expression, which are usually upheld in practice. There is also a deep-rooted cultural emphasis on individual freedom.

However, those very freedoms, and openness to challenge, debate and due process — combined with the sometimes also very strong, deeply-rooted Christian conservatism of some Americans — means that secular, humanist and civil liberties groups find themselves facing a continual battle to preserve the inherent secularism of the constitution from persistent challenges, often involving state authorities or officials, or individuals, citing “religious freedom” in an attempt to bypass separation of church and state, to enforce particular religious beliefs in the public sphere, or in some way “establish” religion. Thanks to founding constitutional principles, these battles have usually been won on the side of secularism in the longer term.

## **The constitution, “free exercise” and “establishment”**

The US Constitution is often considered to be one of the world's first political secular documents. The secular tradition in US law comes in part from the diverse religious makeup of the original colonies and the enlightenment idea that no one religion should come to be dominant in politics.

The First Amendment of the United States Constitution protects the right to freedom of religion and freedom of expression from government interference.

*“Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the government for a redress of grievances.”*

*The Amendment has two clauses directly relating to the relationship between state and religion. The “Free Exercise Clause”, protects the rights of people to hold whatever religious beliefs he or she wants, and to exercise that belief. This protection has also been extended to the right to non-belief. The “Establishment*

*Clause” forbids the establishment of a state church and prevents the government, both state and federal, from favoring any one religious doctrine. This is often called the separation clause, referring to Thomas Jefferson’s description of “a wall of separation between church and state”.*

The Constitution also prevents religious requirements for public office with Article 6 stating: “no religious Test shall ever be required as a Qualification to any Office or public Trust under the United States”.

Broadly speaking, these clauses combine to create an largely open society in which all people are afforded the same legal rights to practice religion or not; convert from one religion to another, or reconvert altogether; to express beliefs regarding religion; and to participate in all areas of public life.

In 2019, the American Humanist Association scored a victory in its battle for guaranteeing Church-State separation in the US: after a long legislative struggle, the US District Court of Maryland signed a final order prohibiting Carroll County commissioners from leading prayers to public meetings, a practice that had taken hold since 2010. “Carroll County’s prayers unconstitutionally wrapped the power and prestige of the government around the personal religious beliefs of elected officials,” explained Monica Miller, the AHA’s Legal Director and Senior Counsel. [ahuman.convio.net/site/MessageViewer?em\\_id=2961.0&dly\\_id=6684&pgwrap=n](http://ahuman.convio.net/site/MessageViewer?em_id=2961.0&dly_id=6684&pgwrap=n)

## **Concerns regarding Trump presidency**

President Trump courted and won the support of conservative Christian leaders during the election campaign and in subsequent policy-making.

He offered the role of Education Secretary to prominent creationist Jerry Falwell but in the end went with billionaire Republican party donor Betsy DeVos, a Christian campaigner against marriage equality and ardently in favour of the school vouchers system. The National Education Association criticised her appointment saying: “her efforts over the years have done more to undermine public education than support students. She has lobbied for failed schemes, like vouchers — which take away funding and local control from our public schools — to fund private schools at taxpayers’ expense.” The voucher system effectively channels taxpayers’ money to religious schools in particular, which do not have to

serve families of all religions or beliefs equally. Rabbi Jack Moline, president of Interfaith Alliance, commented: "Americans are always free to send their children to private schools and religious schools, but raiding the public treasury to subsidize private businesses and religious organizations runs against the public trust and the Constitution" and that the move suggests that Trump "has little regard for... the constitutional principle of separation of church and state."

Along with vice-president Mike Pence, the Trump administration represents various threats to LGBTI rights. Trump has also said he would like to criminalize the burning of the American flag with prison terms or the revocation of citizenship, a policy widely-denounced as contrary to the free expression, as well as being a violation of the human right to citizenship. Executive Director of the American Humanist Association, Roy Speckhardt, commented in the wake of Trump's election: "No matter how thin Trump's veneer of religiosity may be, make no mistake that the Religious Right has just assumed a mantle of power that exceeds their fondest hopes and humanists' worst nightmares."

[patheos.com/blogs/friendlyatheist/2016/11/14/donald-trump-women-may-have-to-go-to-another-state-to-obtain-abortions-under-his-supreme-court/](http://patheos.com/blogs/friendlyatheist/2016/11/14/donald-trump-women-may-have-to-go-to-another-state-to-obtain-abortions-under-his-supreme-court/)>

[bigstory.ap.org/article/df9a14336c64485cabb5fdc81ded5981/falwell-says-trump-offered-him-education-secretary-job](http://bigstory.ap.org/article/df9a14336c64485cabb5fdc81ded5981/falwell-says-trump-offered-him-education-secretary-job)>

[washingtonpost.com/local/education/trump-picks-billionaire-betsy-devos-school-voucher-advocate-as-education-secretary/2016/11/23/c3d66b94-af96-11e6-840f-e3ebab6bcdd3\\_story.html](http://washingtonpost.com/local/education/trump-picks-billionaire-betsy-devos-school-voucher-advocate-as-education-secretary/2016/11/23/c3d66b94-af96-11e6-840f-e3ebab6bcdd3_story.html)>

[huffingtonpost.com/entry/ignorance-won-can-we-return-to-reason\\_us\\_58233104e4b0334571e0a3a0](http://huffingtonpost.com/entry/ignorance-won-can-we-return-to-reason_us_58233104e4b0334571e0a3a0)>

During his term in office, various threats to American secularism have emerged.

Speaking at an event called 'National Prayer Breakfast' in February 2019, Trump promised to help religious adoption agencies that chose not to work with gay parents as he claimed they should be free to follow "their deeply held beliefs".

[washingtonpost.com/religion/2019/02/07/trump-just-promised-help-religious-adoption-agencies-that-wont-work-with-gay-parents-heres-what-he-could-do/](http://washingtonpost.com/religion/2019/02/07/trump-just-promised-help-religious-adoption-agencies-that-wont-work-with-gay-parents-heres-what-he-could-do/)>

In August 2019, the Trump administration also announced a proposal which would extend to for-profit companies whose owners claim to follow a religious belief the right currently granted exclusively to non-profit religious organisations to enter into contracts with the federal government with an exemption from the

requirement to not discriminate in employment on the basis of religion. Liberal religious groups have argued that such reform is not necessary to protect religious liberty and would infringe civil rights laws. American Atheists started a petition against the proposal.

<[washingtonpost.com/religion/2019/08/14/trump-administration-proposes-protecting-federal-contractors-who-fire-or-hire-workers-based-religious-beliefs/](https://www.washingtonpost.com/religion/2019/08/14/trump-administration-proposes-protecting-federal-contractors-who-fire-or-hire-workers-based-religious-beliefs/)>  
<[atheists.org/2019/08/federal-contractors-discriminate-religion/](https://atheists.org/2019/08/federal-contractors-discriminate-religion/)>

In September 2019, the American Humanist Association expressed concerns regarding Trump's declarations during the United Nations Global Call to Protect Religious Freedom event. The President "announced the formation of a coalition of U.S. business leaders meant to "encourage the private sector to protect people of all faiths in the workplace"", noticeably omitting humanists or non-religious people.

<[ahuman.convio.net/site/MessageViewer?em\\_id=3042.0&dlv\\_id=6761&pgwrap=n](https://ahuman.convio.net/site/MessageViewer?em_id=3042.0&dlv_id=6761&pgwrap=n)>

Trump's Secretary of State Mike Pompeo also made Christian nationalist declarations in October 2019, noting that "he asks God for direction" in his work as well as he "directly linked his work as one of the administration's top officials to his role as an "imperfect servant serving a perfect God"", echoing a similar recent statement by Attorney General William Barr who also warned that ""militant secularists" are behind a campaign to destroy traditional moral order". Roy Speckhardt, director of the American Humanist Association, commented: "the Trump administration's flagrant promotion of Christian ideology is a gift to Christian nationalists. This religious favoritism is the kind of abuse of their duty to represent all Americans equally that demonstrates how fundamentalism is the driving force of this administration's agenda."

<[americanhumanist.org/press-releases/humanists-respond-to-weekend-of-christian-nationalism-from-trump-officials/](https://americanhumanist.org/press-releases/humanists-respond-to-weekend-of-christian-nationalism-from-trump-officials/)>

<[theguardian.com/us-news/2019/oct/19/william-barr-attorney-general-catholic-conservative-speech](https://theguardian.com/us-news/2019/oct/19/william-barr-attorney-general-catholic-conservative-speech)>

## **Trump vs the Johnson Amendment**

For many US secularists, president Trump's tax reforms, particularly the provisions concerning the Johnson Amendment, represent a new threat to "church-state" separation in the United States. They fear that allowing religious

leaders (for example, including wealthy and influential mega-churches) to participate in partisan politics will lead to an increase in the involvement of religion in American politics and potentially pool electorate influence in the hands of pastors.

Others, such as Jay Sekulow, chief counsel for the American Center for Law and Justice, argues that the Johnson Amendment: “prevents religious leaders from truly exercising their constitutionally-protected free speech rights when they act in their official capacity as a pastor or head of a religious, tax-exempt organisation.”

[latimes.com/opinion/op-ed/la-oe-balmer-johnson-amendment-20170202-story.html](http://latimes.com/opinion/op-ed/la-oe-balmer-johnson-amendment-20170202-story.html)

There is no restriction on a religious leaders right to act in a partisan fashion, however at present if they do so act, their tax exempt status will be revoked.

Roy Speckhardt of the American Humanist Association explains that: “The Johnson Amendment is a key protection for everyone’s constitutional right to be free from religious coercion in government. And Trump’s false claim that it’s silencing ministers is just a smoke screen for his real agenda of setting aside the Johnson Amendment so he can open up churches to be used as political action committees.”

[americanhumanist.org/press-releases/humanists-rail-trumps-theocratic-speech/](http://americanhumanist.org/press-releases/humanists-rail-trumps-theocratic-speech/)

## **“Under God” and “In God we Trust”**

Despite the long history of the secular constitution, the Cold War Era in the 1950s saw increased paranoia towards atheism because of its association with Communism. In 1951 the Catholic group “The Knights of Columbus” successfully lobbied to have the words “Under God” added to the pledge of allegiance. The pledge is said during the opening of sessions of Congress, the beginning of numerous state and local government meetings and at the beginning of a school day. It is also popular during the July 4th festivities.

[oldtimeislands.org/pledge/pledge.htm](http://oldtimeislands.org/pledge/pledge.htm)

Similarly, the United states Motto was established in 1956 as “In God We Trust” and can be found on all paper currency in the US. There have been numerous

unsuccessful campaigns since the 1950s, by secular and religious minority groups alike, to secularise both the pledge and the motto. These have included numerous supreme and appeals court cases, the most recent being in April 2014.

[religionnews.com/2014/05/28/atheists-lose-latest-legal-fight-god-trust/](http://religionnews.com/2014/05/28/atheists-lose-latest-legal-fight-god-trust/)

The Don't Say the Pledge campaign by the American Humanist Association had some success in 2015, establishing precedents against the enforced recitation of the pledge by students in school settings.

[dontsaythepledge.com](http://dontsaythepledge.com)

[americanhumanist.org/news/details/2015-10-student-may-sit-during-the-pledge-of-allegiance-says](http://americanhumanist.org/news/details/2015-10-student-may-sit-during-the-pledge-of-allegiance-says)

## Religious monuments on government land

The U.S. Constitution prohibits the government from endorsing one religion over the other, but there have been many attempts to establish religion, particularly Christianity, in the form of religious monuments on public property. However, results from a variety of lawsuits have been mixed.

In April 2014, the American Humanist Association successfully challenged plans to erect a memorial honoring war veterans that included an image of a soldier kneeling to a Christian cross. However, in November 2015, the association lost a similar case challenging a 40-foot Christian cross, known as the Peace Cross, in Bladensburg, Maryland.

The holiday season in December often results in an uptick of constitutional violations regarding religious displays on public property. Local governments often place stand-alone nativity scenes (also known as creches) on public grounds, which violates the Establishment Clause. However, local governments have found a way around the law by allowing other religious holiday displays along with the nativity scenes, such as menorahs. A number of local humanist organizations have requested permission to display a HumanLight sign or other display representing humanists, atheists, and freethinkers.

## State Laws

Although the Constitution is secular, there are significant anti-secular issues at the state level. Despite the constitutional prohibition (Article 6) of any "religious

test” for public office, there are currently 8 states where the laws directly block those who deny the existence of God or “a supreme being” from holding public office. This can even extend to the banning of atheists from testifying in court. An example of this is the State constitution of Arkansas which explicitly mentions atheists:

“1: Atheists disqualified from holding office or testifying as witness.

No person who denies the being of a God shall hold any office in the civil departments of this State, nor be competent to testify as a witness in any Court.”

— <[arkleg.state.ar.us/assembly/Summary/ArkansasConstitution1874.pdf](http://arkleg.state.ar.us/assembly/Summary/ArkansasConstitution1874.pdf)>

Similar laws exist in Maryland, Mississippi, Texas, both Carolinas, Tennessee and Pennsylvania.

<[ffrf.org/faq/feeds/item/14017-religious-tests-for-public-office](http://ffrf.org/faq/feeds/item/14017-religious-tests-for-public-office)>

Numerous federal test cases have declared these laws unconstitutional. But there has been insufficient political will to amend them.

## **Education and children’s rights**

The role of religion in American public schools has been a source of heated debate for decades. The Establishment Clause has generally been interpreted as prohibiting the observance or promotion of religion in state-funded schools.

Despite the clear prohibition against public funding for religious schools, there are some cases where state and federal funding can be used to send children to private religious schools through a voucher program. There is an argument to be made that this constitutes indirect funding of religious schools.

<[secular.org/issues/vouchers](http://secular.org/issues/vouchers)>

<[americanhumanist.org/news/details/2015-07-stop-vouchers-oppose-government-funding-of-religious](http://americanhumanist.org/news/details/2015-07-stop-vouchers-oppose-government-funding-of-religious)>

In 2015, religious and secular groups protested the possible creation of a private school voucher programme under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) under the guise of “portability” of voucher entitlements. The groups protested that “The portability provision undermines Title I’s fundamental



purpose of assisting public schools with high concentrations of poverty and high-need students and serves as a stepping-stone to private school vouchers...”

<[americanhumanist.org/news/details/2015-10-aha-joins-groups-opposing-private-school-vouchers](http://americanhumanist.org/news/details/2015-10-aha-joins-groups-opposing-private-school-vouchers)>

School prayer has been a major heatedly contested issue. Since the 1960s, schools have been forbidden to compose prayers for students or include prayer as part of official school proceedings. Students are allowed to pray in groups or on their own independent of formal school proceedings as long as it is not disruptive. Other expressions of religion, such as religious clothing, are protected under the free exercise clause of the 1st amendment. Despite a recent decline in support a 2011 poll found that 65% of the Americans support school prayer. Over the decades there have been numerous legal cases, many of which have gone as far as the supreme court.

<[aclu.org/religion-belief/aclu-and-freedom-religion-and-belief](http://aclu.org/religion-belief/aclu-and-freedom-religion-and-belief)>

<[infidels.org/library/modern/church-state/decisions.html](http://infidels.org/library/modern/church-state/decisions.html)>

Many local School districts are run by a board directly elected by the local population. Whilst this direct involvement can be seen as positive, in some cases, it has led to the school board’s domination by religious ideologues. This has often lead to school boards attempting to introduce creationism and intelligent design curricula such as during the Kitzmiller v. Dover case in 2005. A more recent and complex case can be found in the East Ramapo School District where the Orthodox Jewish dominated board has been accused of favouring Jewish students who attend Private Orthodox schools whilst defunding the places of up to 9,000 public school students.

<[thisamericanlife.org/radio-archives/episode/534/transcript](http://thisamericanlife.org/radio-archives/episode/534/transcript)>

<[nytimes.com/2014/11/18/nyregion/east-ramapo-school-board-is-criticized-by-new-york-city-monitor.html?\\_r=0](http://nytimes.com/2014/11/18/nyregion/east-ramapo-school-board-is-criticized-by-new-york-city-monitor.html?_r=0)>

On June 26, 2017, the Supreme Court sided with religious institutions in a major church-state decision. The American Humanist Association (AHA) expressed serious concern over the ruling that requires taxpayer money to flow to a Missouri church school for playground improvements. David Niose, the Legal Director at the AHA’s Appignani Humanist Legal Centre, said: “This decision, requiring the transfer of tax money from hard working Missourians to houses of worship, is an assault on the principle of church-state separation.”

<[americanhumanist.org/featured/aha-condemns-supreme-court-ruling-sending-](http://americanhumanist.org/featured/aha-condemns-supreme-court-ruling-sending-)

[tax-dollars-churches/>](#)

## Family, community and society

### Hobby Lobby

On 25 March 2014, the Supreme Court heard arguments for the cases [Sebelius v Hobby Lobby Stores, Inc. and Conestoga Wood Specialties Corp. v Sebelius](#). The Hobby Lobby Stores and Conestoga Wood Specialties are both Christian-owned stores that were concerned about the ‘contraceptive mandate’, which would require that businesses that offer health insurance to their employees must also cover all federally-approved contraception methods for them at no additional cost. The store owners believe that four of those contraceptive methods are equivalent to abortion. They argued that the contraceptives would burden their religious exercise and sought for an exemption. They argued that they were entitled to exemption under the RFRA (Religious Freedom Restoration Act) and the administration had granted exemptions to some churches and religious nonprofit organizations, showing that the mandate could not be the least restrictive means of achieving a compelling state interest. The government had argued that for-profit corporations’ owners do not receive such exemptions. However, the Supreme Court eventually ruled in a 5-4 decision that a closely-held company can be exempt from contraceptive coverage under the Affordable Care Act.

[<economist.com/blogs/economist-explains/2014/03/economist-explains-19>](#)

[<msnbc.com/msnbc/hobby-lobby-supreme-court-wins-narrow-ruling>](#)

### Social Pressure on the Non-religious

The US has among the highest religiosity in the western world, though there has been a marked rise in the number of people identifying as non-religious or religiously “unaffiliated” in recent years. Statistics from 2018 indicate that there are now as many Americans who identify as non-religious as there are Evangelicals and Catholics (about 23%).

[<pewforum.org/2015/05/12/americas-changing-religious-landscape/>](#)

[<edition.cnn.com/2019/04/13/us/no-religion-largest-group-first-time-usa-trnd/index.html>](#)

Despite strong legal and constitutional protections for the religious and secular

alike, the U.S. has long been home to a social and political atmosphere in which the non-religious are sometimes made to feel like lesser Americans or as if atheism is “un-American”.

Opinion polls have regularly suggested that the majority of Americans would be less likely to vote for a presidential candidate if they were an atheist. One survey suggested that “No other trait, including being gay or having never held elected office, garnered a larger share of people saying they’d be less likely to support the potential candidate.” Other surveys have shown that 60% of Americans (75% of Evangelicals) have a less favourable view of atheists than most other belief groups.

[pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2014/05/29/americans-are-somewhat-more-open-to-the-idea-of-an-atheist-president/](http://pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2014/05/29/americans-are-somewhat-more-open-to-the-idea-of-an-atheist-president/)>

[pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2014/07/16/u-s-evangelical-christians-are-chilly-toward-atheists-and-the-feeling-is-mutual/](http://pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2014/07/16/u-s-evangelical-christians-are-chilly-toward-atheists-and-the-feeling-is-mutual/)>

It’s worth noting that these surveys actually represent an improvement in the reputation of atheists when compared to similar studies undertaken in previous years.

In some states more than others, the prevailing social prejudice against atheists and the non-religious reinforces, and is reinforced by, the political support for religious, especially Christian, privilege. While there is legal remedy for clear discrimination on grounds of religion or belief, it can often go unchallenged in situations where it is difficult, or personally disadvantageous or hazardous, to take a stand against authority, for example in prisons, the military, and even some administrative contexts.

In 2017, some media in the US were quick to attempt to associate Texas Church gunman Devin Kelly’s actions with a ‘militant atheist’ ideology despite their being no evidence of religious affiliation between Kelly or those inside the church. Many fake news articles reverberated around conservative social network sources used by many large, right wing media stations. <[news.vice.com/story/facebook-is-still-spreading-conspiracies-48-hours-after-texas-shooting](http://news.vice.com/story/facebook-is-still-spreading-conspiracies-48-hours-after-texas-shooting)>

Following the presidential election of Donald Trump in November 2016, right-wing Christian lobby group National Organization for Marriage (NOM) have vowed to work with Trump to reverse equal marriage throughout the country, and

to bring about an end to the US's persuasions to equalise marriage abroad.

[http://www.patheos.com/blogs/friendlyatheist/2016/11/10/anti-lgbt-christians-are-already-working-to-undo-marriage-equality/?utm\\_source=dlvr.it&utm\\_medium=twitter](http://www.patheos.com/blogs/friendlyatheist/2016/11/10/anti-lgbt-christians-are-already-working-to-undo-marriage-equality/?utm_source=dlvr.it&utm_medium=twitter)

## **Freedom of expression, advocacy of humanist values**

The United States has a strong constitutional tradition, and the constitution famously guarantees freedom of expression. The concept of free speech is deeply embedded in the culture.

However there are concerns following the November 2016 elections that President Trump has repeatedly questioned the right to opinion of various media outlets and individual commentators. In a characteristically blasé tweet of 29 November 2016 he said: "Nobody should be allowed to burn the American flag - if they do, there must be consequences - perhaps loss of citizenship or year in jail!" Whether the first amendment to the US constitution protects flag-burning has been a recurrent question in free speech debate and may be considered a touchstone issue. Trump's stance is contrary to a Supreme Court decision of 1989 which found that flag-burning was a constitutionally protected expression.

## **Atheists in Congress**

Anti-non-religious sentiment has fed into the social idea that to be really American is to be religious, especially Christian, which in turn creates an atmosphere in which elected officials, or candidates seeking office, feel the need to play into that idea. There is a clear right to be an atheist, but going public as such, in some states or in some social or political contexts, might have debilitating consequences for your chances of success in life.

For example, there are several Congress members who refuse to list their religious affiliation but only one of the 535 members of Congress claim to be non-religious (Rep. Kyrsten Sinema (Arizona) listed "none" under the category of religious affiliation). One former Congressman, Barney Frank, who had previously suggested he was an atheist, said in his 2015 memoir that, "In fact, I am not an atheist", and even advised others against using the term.

[patheos.com/blogs/friendlyatheist/2015/04/06/former-congressman-barney-frank-atheist-politicians-shouldnt-use-the-word-atheist/](http://patheos.com/blogs/friendlyatheist/2015/04/06/former-congressman-barney-frank-atheist-politicians-shouldnt-use-the-word-atheist/)

Despite the dearth of known non-religious politicians in Congress, the American Humanist Association suggested in 2014 that dozens have in fact stated privately they are non-religious, but are afraid to “come out”.

[huffingtonpost.com/2014/08/22/atheist-congress-members\\_n\\_5701377.html](http://huffingtonpost.com/2014/08/22/atheist-congress-members_n_5701377.html)

## Same-sex marriage

In June 2015, the Supreme Court established the right of same-sex couples to marry, in a landmark ruling (Obergefell v. Hodges). Implementation of the decision, which effectively legalised same-sex marriage nationwide, has faced opposition from some conservative religious groups.

## Highlighted cases

There were some mixed signs for secular equality in the justice system in 2015. In February 2015, after a hearing on charges of DUI (driving under the influence), one **Michael Baker** was required to attend Alcoholics Anonymous (“AA”) meetings as a condition of his parole, despite being an atheist and despite officially raising objections to his parole officer and again at a hearing in August, and despite being verbally harassed for his atheism by other attendees at the AA meetings he did attend. At the most recent hearing in August, despite recognising the “spiritual basis” of AA, the judge ordered Baker to attend.

*“The state cannot require an atheist to undergo faith-based treatment, as doing so clearly violates the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment. In fact, the Ninth Circuit has twice held that a parolee’s right to be free from coerced participation in AA is a matter of ‘uncommonly well-settled case law...’”*

— Monica Miller, senior counsel, Appignani Humanist Legal Center

[americanhumanist.org/news/details/2015-09-humanist-group-defends-atheist-sentenced-to-attend-f](http://americanhumanist.org/news/details/2015-09-humanist-group-defends-atheist-sentenced-to-attend-f)

**Jason Holden**, a humanist inmate at the Federal Correctional Institution in Sheridan, Oregon, was denied the right to form a humanist study group and to

identify as a humanist for official purposes. However, in this case, acting on Holden's behalf, the American Humanist Association's Appignani Humanist Legal Center reached a favorable settlement with the Federal Bureau of Prisons. "This settlement is a victory for all humanists in the federal prison system, who will no longer be denied the rights that religious individuals are accorded," commented Roy Speckhardt, executive director of the American Humanist Association. Under the terms of the enforceable settlement, the Bureau must acknowledge humanism as a worldview in parity with theistic religious beliefs, provide information as required, recognize those who wish to identify as humanist for official assignment purposes, and must permit humanist study groups.

[americanhumanist.org/news/details/2015-07-american-humanist-association-secures-equal-rights-f](http://americanhumanist.org/news/details/2015-07-american-humanist-association-secures-equal-rights-f)

In 2017, a lawsuit was filed by American Atheists alleging that a developmentally disabled child was forcibly baptized against the expressed wishes of his parents by a minister and a court approved mentor. The child, referred to as "V" in the court filing, was taken to a church picnic in August 2016 by the child's mentor. During the picnic, the mentor and the church's pastor subjected V to a full-immersion baptism. The lawsuit alleges that V's court-appointed guardian Margaret Vaughan repeatedly attempted to convert V's parents and their children and told them that "families need God to raise children." On August 28, 2016, V's mentor took V to a picnic at his church and, along with the church pastor, forcibly baptized V, pushing him under water. Since the incident, V is said to have suffered anxiety and emotional distress.

[atheists.org/2017/03/child-forced-baptism/](http://atheists.org/2017/03/child-forced-baptism/)