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November 23, 2015

Mick McHale  
National Association of Police Organizations  
317 South Patrick Street  
Alexandria, Virginia 22314

Dear President McHale:

The Secular Policy Institute and the undersigned organizations request that your association highly consider advising and educating police officers regarding the use of religious decals on secular government vehicles. These actions can be divisive and threatening toward the over thirty percent non-religious in the U.S.

Darren Goforth, a Texas sheriff's deputy was brutally murdered on August 15th this year. With 15 shots fired, Goforth was assassinated at a gas station. Different law enforcement agencies in Arkansas, Florida, Kentucky, Texas, and Virginia decided to admirably show solidarity with their fallen brother. What should have been an otherwise beautiful act of remembrance and healing became a point of highly divisive controversy. A beautiful sentiment of honoring a public servant, fallen in the line of duty became a rallying point for argument and exclusion. The United States has two national mottos, of these "In God We Trust" was chosen to be placed as a decal upon police and sheriff cars. Unlike "In God We Trust" (which was adopted as a national motto in 1956-mainly to counter communism), E Pluribus Unum has been with us since 1776. E Pluribus Unum is a far more accurate representation about what is best of America: "out of the many, one." "In God We Trust" offers too much liability for government officials to seize license to impose their own perspective for which God our trust is placed in. The Secular Policy Institute lauds the show of unity and support, but recommends that all Law Enforcement and other public agencies that have (or are considering) adopted the decals replace them with the more inclusive and appropriate second option.

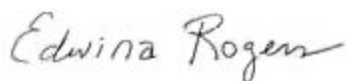
San Juan, Texas resident Paul Ramirez was one of those feeling excluded by "In God We Trust." Ramirez sought aid from the Freedom From Religion Foundation (FFRF), and organization who hears complaints relating to church-state separation violations. The FFRF sent one of their many letters addressing this issue to the Childress Police Department, whose police chief (Adrian Garcia) mentioned on his Facebook page, that the FFRF could "go fly a kite." Texas Governor Greg Abbott played a troublesome game dismissing one first amendment right (Ramirez petitioning for a redress of grievances against his government) and another religious exercise. In his letter to Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton purporting to "preserve the religious liberties of all Texans," Governor Abbott chastised what he called both the American Humanist Association and the FFRF's work to be "misguided and malicious." Abbott implicitly bundled any promotion of secular government or other challenge to Christian privilege as attacks on religious liberty that harm those of religious faith and the "freedom of conscience of all Americans."

E Pluribus Unum has been deeply embedded in the symbolism and American ethos since our nation's founding. From the industrious contributions and through the incredible sacrifices to create and participate in the American-experiment and experience by those struggling to join us across oceans or to shatter barriers of slavery and exclusion; we find that the many coming together makes us fundamentally stronger morally and socially. Though many will continue to cherish "In God We Trust," we must come to terms with how the slogan was grafted into the popular American narrative. While Francis Scott Key first penned these words in the *Defense of Fort M'Henry*, they did not become part of our national anthem until 1931, nor our national motto until 1956. Though for many, on its face "In God We Trust" produces deep feelings of patriotism and pride; it is far more chilling when one studies how this slogan was thrust upon us. This process involved a combination of artificial usurping of what should be left to the autonomy of spiritual communities by the U.S. Government and the advertising agency in the 1940's and 1950's to tell us what we needed to believe and how often we needed to participate in religious exercise. When the veil is lifted "In God We Trust" is seen for what it is, a tool of political manipulation and spiritual coercion by government. To unite behind memorializing a fallen officer, a message of national unity is a far more appropriate memorial than propaganda.

While the constitutionality of "In God We Trust" remains temporarily secure, this is based upon an arena of neutrality where when the government involves itself in religion, it mustn't send a message to adherents of a particular faith that they are political insiders, and non-adherents that they are outsiders to the political community (Justice O'Connor's proposed "Endorsement Test" in her *Lynch v. Donnelly* concurrence [1984]). The latent and manifest statements by Texas executive and law enforcement officials clearly sends the message that those with a religious stance pertaining to Abrahamic-monotheism are of the favored community, and that those without an affiliation with Abrahamic-monotheism are attacking good society from the outside. The U.S. Supreme Court recently ruled on a case where the Texas Division of the "Sons of Confederate Veterans" were suing the state for their proposed Confederate flag vanity license plates were being declined as a matter of censoring their free speech rights. Associate Justice Breyer wrote the decision in which regardless of private individuals paying extra for the specialized-plates; the license plates were still associated by the public as being a message of the state. As public officials are openly hostile to those who are not adherents to monotheism, and as the messages are at public expense on public vehicles; neutrality is nowhere to be seen and this is a clear message of exclusion.

The Secular Policy Institute and the undersigned are not against inspirational, mobilizing messages in the public sphere. We do however respectfully request that these messages be in line with the inclusion provided by abiding by secular laws. We ask that all current decals either be removed or replaced with "E Pluribus Unum."

Yours sincerely,



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## **Signatories**

Humanist Chaplaincy at American University - Washington, DC

Humanists of North Central Florida - Ocala, Florida

Northern Ohio Freethought Society - Cleveland, Ohio

Red River Freethinkers - Fargo, North Dakota

Rossmoor Atheists - Walnut Creek, California

Skepticality - Altadena, California

Steel City Skeptics - Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

The Central Florida Freethought Community - Oviedo, Florida

The Freethought Society - Pocopson, Pennsylvania

United Coalition of Reason - Washington, DC