

Dear Senator/Representative:

Iowa Atheists and Freethinkers (IAF) is a nonprofit corporation based in Des Moines. You may have heard of IAF from advertisements placed on DART buses in Des Moines in August. The advertisements read "Don't believe in God? You are not alone."

IAF members are writing to object to prayers that begin each legislative day. We object not because some of our legislators want to pray, but because our elected representatives choose to make prayer official state business. We object because the prayers are sectarian with invited clergy invoking the name of Jesus Christ. We object because our taxpayer dollars are being spent to pay invited clergy \$10 for each chamber they pray in and to reimburse the invited clergy's roundtrip mileage. We object because attendance for the prayers becomes mandatory for clerks, pages, and other legislative staff whose work requires them to be in the chambers at the time of the prayer because the chambers' doors are closed and no one is allowed to leave.

IAF advocates for Iowa's non-religious community. The numbers of people choosing not to affiliate with religion has been growing both nationally and locally. According to the February 2009 Pew Forums on Religion and Public Life survey, 15 percent of Iowans chose no affiliation with any religion. The non-religious population is comprised of more individuals than any single religious denomination in the United States, save Roman Catholicism.

IAF has members all over the state. As elected representatives of your districts and of all Iowans, your governmental practices and traditions should reflect the diversity of the people you serve. An officially sanctioned prayer by Iowa's legislators alienates every voter and citizen who is not religious and whose religion differs from the prayers your invited clergy and some legislators themselves offer.

IAF members request that the daily prayer be eliminated as an official legislative activity. IAF members request that the prayer be held prior to legislators gaveling in for the start of the legislative day and that the chambers remain open to ensure that attendance is voluntary. This would require that legislators replace House Resolution 2 (passed January 12, 2009), which specifically addresses opening prayers. Additionally, IAF members request that Senate Concurrent Resolution 2 (adopted February 24, 2009) be updated so that invited chaplains are no longer paid any amount for their services and are no longer reimbursed for their mileage expenses to the State Capitol.

Thank you for your service to our state. If you would like to contact IAF members or have questions, please send your queries as a reply to this message; visit IAF's website at www.iowaatheists.org; or write to IAF, P.O. Box 672, Des Moines, IA 50303-0672.

Sincerely,

Randy Henderson, IAF President