

# FREEDOM FROM RELIGION *foundation*

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

March 5, 2024

**SENT VIA EMAIL AND U.S. MAIL:**

**mayorsph@cmvny.com**

Shawyn Patterson-Howard

Mayor

City of Mount Vernon

1 Roosevelt Square N

Mount Vernon, NY 10550

Re: Unconstitutional Religious Promotion on Social Media

Dear Mayor Patterson-Howard:

I am once again writing on behalf of the Freedom From Religion Foundation (FFRF) regarding a constitutional violation occurring on your official Facebook page. FFRF is a national nonprofit organization with more than 40,000 members across the country, including over 2,000 members in New York. Our purposes are to protect the constitutional principle of separation between state and church, and to educate the public on matters relating to nontheism. We have written to you previously on three other occasions regarding your unconstitutional promotion of religion. Those letters have been attached for your convenience.

Unfortunately, we have once again received a report from a concerned community member regarding your continued use of your official social media page to promote Christianity. It is our understanding that you regularly post bible verses and other posts promoting Christianity on a page where you are representing yourself as the Mayor of Mount Vernon, using your official title. It appears that this page is run by a person named Danny Terry on your behalf. Please see the attached image.

You must remove these posts and cease using your position as Mayor to promote your personal religious beliefs. If you are not the individual responsible for this religious promotion on this page, you must ensure that the person in charge of running this page is informed of your constitutional obligation of religious neutrality. If you wish to post religious content you must do so on your personal social media accounts where you are not acting in your official capacity.

As a government official, you are tasked with upholding the Constitution of the United States—including the Establishment Clause. By promoting Christianity on your official Facebook page, you do the opposite. You serve a religiously diverse community that consists not only of Christians but also Jews, Muslims, atheists and other non-Christians. While you may

view your message as being inclusive, it is anything but. When you post overtly religious messages praying to a god to your official social media, you needlessly alienate your constituents who are part of the thirty-seven percent of Americans who are non-Christian, including the nearly one in three Americans who now identify as religiously unaffiliated.<sup>1</sup> You send the message that you and your office prefer those citizens who are religious over those who are nonreligious.

Government employees can worship, pray, and post religious messages anytime they wish when acting in their personal capacities. But they are not permitted to provide prestige to religion through the machinery of a government office. Your elected office belongs to “We the people,” not the office’s temporary occupant. As mayor, you are charged with great responsibility and have been given significant trust by citizens in your community, including those citizens who do not share your religious viewpoint.

We ask you to honor the Constitution you were elected to uphold and respect your Establishment Clause obligations. Thank you for your time and attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Kat D. Grant", is displayed on a light gray rectangular background.

Kat D. Grant

*Equal Justice Works Fellow (sponsored by the Wm. Collins Kohler Foundation)  
Freedom From Religion Foundation*

Enclosures

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<sup>1</sup> Gregory A. Smith, *About Three-in-Ten U.S. Adults Are Now Religiously Unaffiliated*, Pew Research Center (Dec. 14, 2021), available at [www.pewforum.org/2021/12/14/about-three-in-ten-u-s-adults-are-now-religiously-unaffiliated/](http://www.pewforum.org/2021/12/14/about-three-in-ten-u-s-adults-are-now-religiously-unaffiliated/).



Mayor Shawyn Patterson-Howard



## Intro

Mayor of the City of Mount Vernon, the Jewel of Westchester.  
President African American Mayors Assoc

**Page** · Government Official

**Danny Terry**  
is responsible for this Page

Mount Vernon, NY

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[cmvny.com/mayors-office](http://cmvny.com/mayors-office)

Always open ▾



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Mayor Shawyn Patterson-Howard

1d ·



**I Say Yes Lord Yes  
To Your Will And To Your Way.  
I Say Yes Lord Yes.  
I Will Trust You and Obey.**

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13 comments 1 share