



NEWS RELEASE

OFFICE OF ATTORNEY GENERAL HENRY McMASTER
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AG Joins Great Falls Prayer Appeal To U.S. Supreme Court

Columbia, S.C. - Attorney General Henry McMaster announced today that the State of South Carolina has once again joined the town of Great Falls' efforts to appeal a federal court's order preventing the town from mentioning the name of Jesus Christ in prayers at town meetings.

McMaster filed an Amicus brief to the United States Supreme Court in support of the town of Great Falls on Thursday, February 24, 2005. After having two appeals for rehearing denied by the U.S. Fourth Circuit Court of Appeals, the town of Great Falls filed a petition to have the case heard in the nation's highest court.

"If the Fourth Circuit Court of Appeals' ruling stands, courts will certainly entangle themselves in the business of prayer content review," McMaster said today. "A court practicing such content-based review raises serious Free Speech and Free Exercise problems under the First Amendment."

"It is illogical and unhistorical to conclude that while a prayer for Divine guidance is constitutionally acceptable, prayer to a Divine Being is not," McMaster continued.

In August 2001, Great Falls resident Darla Kaye Wynne, a Wiccan high priestess, filed a federal lawsuit seeking to stop references to Jesus Christ in town council's prayers, claiming the prayers violated the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution.

On August 21, 2003, U.S. District Judge Cameron Currie agreed, issuing an order prohibiting council from using the "name of a specific deity associated with any one specific faith or belief in prayers given at town council meetings."

McMaster, on behalf of the State, filed a motion on October 15, 2003, indicating the State would file an amicus brief with the Fourth Circuit U.S. Court of Appeals in Richmond, Va., in support of the Town of Great Falls' appeal.

The town of Great Falls filed a petition for rehearing and rehearing en banc, which would have had their appeal heard by the entire court. A three-judge panel denied the town's appeal on July 22, 2004.

McMaster filed an Amicus brief to the full U.S. Fourth Circuit Court of Appeals in support of the town of Great Falls on Thursday, August 5, 2004. The court again refused to hear the town's appeal.

Copies of the Attorney General's amicus brief are available online:
<http://www.scattorneygeneral.com/newsroom/pdf/greatfalls.pdf>

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