



*Promoting reason, science, and freedom of inquiry.*

Mr. John Scholtz  
Ottawa County Parks & Recreation Dept.  
Room 267, 12220 Fillmore Street  
West Olive, MI 49460

January 15, 2015

Dear Mr. Scholtz,

We are writing to you on behalf of Center for Inquiry ("CFI"), a 501(c)(3) charity whose mission is to foster a secular society based on science, reason, freedom of inquiry, and humanist values. Our organization, headquartered in Amherst, NY, maintains multiple affiliates across the country, including CFI-Michigan which is based in Grand Rapids. We are also writing on behalf of the numerous CFI Members residing in Georgetown Township that do not espouse any religious beliefs.

It has come to our attention that the County Commissioners will be discussing whether a sign containing a verse from the Christian Bible, Psalms 19:1, should be restored to Hager Park.

We want to express our support for your appropriate decision to remove this religious sign from Hager Park in December, 2014, because it was clearly a violation of the core American principle of separation of church and state for taxpayer money, and public property, to be used to send religious messages. This principle of government neutrality regarding religion is required by both the Constitution of the United States of America, as well as the Constitution of the State of Michigan.

Since Hager Park is public property, and exists for the benefit of all Michiganders, of all faiths and no faith, it should not be seen as a place for those of one particular religion, however much of the population they claim to represent, to seek to convert others.

CFI wholeheartedly supports the principle of freedom of religion. We fully defend the rights of Pastor Ryan Kooienga to worship his God, and to preach his Gospel to others. If Harvest Baptist Church wishes to display a sign bearing Psalms 19:1, CFI suggests that they display such a sign on their own church property. It is not the role of local government, however, to send such a religious message on behalf of Harvest Baptist Church, or indeed any other Church or religious group. And it is not the purpose of public property to serve as a billboard for such sectarian religious messages.

The decision to remove the sign was the correct one, both in a legal sense, and in order to fulfill Ottawa County's responsibility to all of its citizens. CFI respectfully requests that you affirm this decision, and that the sign not be replaced. If the sign is replaced, CFI will fully examine its options to ensure that the Constitution is not violated.

Yours Sincerely,

Jennifer Beahan  
Program Director  
Center for Inquiry-Michigan

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Legal Director  
CFI Transnational