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STATE OF ALABAMA

September 22, 2023

Mr. Dan Barker, Co-President
Ms. Annie Laurie Gaylor, Co-President
Freedom From Religious Foundation
P.O. Box 750
Madison, WI 53701

Dear Mr. Barker and Ms. Gaylor:

I write in response to two letters your organization recently sent to institutions of higher learning in Alabama—one complaining that the president of Snead State Community College has led staff in prayer and challenged them with scripture; the other complaining that coaches at Auburn University helped promote an after-hours worship service for college students called “Unite Auburn.”

Suffice it to say, these letters are misleading and misguided. Here in Alabama, we stand with President Whitmore; Coaches Freeze, Pearl, and Thompson; and the countless other Alabamians who seek to be true to themselves—and to God—as they live out their lives and seek to do their jobs to the best of their abilities.

As Governor of Alabama, I take seriously my responsibility to faithfully execute the laws—and that includes safeguarding the religious freedom of *all* Alabamians, religious and nonreligious alike. But the facts described in your recent letters do not violate anyone’s religious liberty. Even according to your own account, these events all involved adults interacting with other adults, and no one faced any threat of adverse consequences for declining to participate.

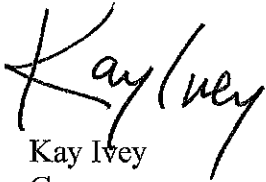
What is more, requiring college officials to entirely remove faith from their lives could well violate those officials’ *own* religious freedom. After all, the First Amendment protects the “free exercise” of religion just as much as it prohibits government establishment of religion.

In my view, we should be more welcoming, not less, to expressions of faith, and society would be worse off were we to purge religion from our public institutions. Over time, faith has been a force for good in this world, leading to countless scientific discoveries, the righting of countless injustices, and the founding of countless orphanages, hospitals, and other charitable and educational institutions. (Indeed, Snead State itself was founded as a religious school.) Prayer, in particular, allows us to reflect upon shared ideals and common goals; it helps us acknowledge our shortcomings; and it fosters change for the better—as individuals and collectively.

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Mr. Barker and Ms. Gaylor, the last thing I want is for Alabama college and university officials to be taking legal advice from an organization that does not recognize these points and whose self-avowed purpose is to promote a strict view of so-called "separation of church and state." I hope you will someday come to know what makes the State of Alabama such a special place for so many of us. In the meantime, please understand that our state motto is "We dare defend our rights." As Governor, I can assure you that we will not be intimidated by out-of-state interest groups dedicated to destroying our nation's religious heritage.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kay Ivey". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large initial "K".

Kay Ivey
Governor