



February 3, 2016

The Honorable Mayor Greg Stanton
City of Phoenix
200 W Jefferson St.
Phoenix, AZ 85003

Dear Mayor Stanton,

The Secular Coalition for Arizona represents the interests of all Arizonans who value public policies free from religious influence and preference. Secular public policy ensures freedom of conscience for all Arizonans.

Prayer at government meetings is unnecessary and divisive. When government bodies lend their power and prestige to organized religion, it amounts to an endorsement that excludes the 27% of the population that does not identify with an organized religion. Even when prayers are “nondenominational,” any form of prayer will inevitably exclude various taxpayers and constituents.

The Secular Coalition for Arizona does not support invocations in public meetings. However, if invocations must occur, the individual City Council members should not have a say in which religious groups are represented and which religious groups are excluded. An invocation policy which allows all groups an opportunity to provide the invocation is the best way to ensure religious freedom for all. This type of policy would not exclude minority religions, atheists, nontheists, and the increasing number of people living in Phoenix who do not subscribe to a particular organized religion or faith.

Because of the legal uncertainty and the exclusionary effect such prayers have on nontheists and others who do not share the faith of the officiant, **the best practice is to discontinue invocations at Council meetings.**

If the Council is unwilling to discontinue invocations at Council meetings, we ask that you continue your current invocation policy that is inclusive for all religions and philosophies.

I would be happy to meet with you to discuss this further and respectfully request a meeting with you on this matter. I will follow up with a phone call to your office within the next week.

Respectfully,

Zenaido Quintana
Chair of the Board
Secular Coalition for Arizona

cc: Vice Mayor Daniel Valenzuela, District 5
Councilmember Thelda Williams, District 1
Councilmember Jim Waring, District 2
Councilmember Bill Gates, District 3
Councilmember Laura Pastor, District 4
Councilmember Sal DiCiccio, District 6
Councilmember Michael Nowakowski, District 7
Councilmember Kate Gallego, District 8