

<sup>1</sup>*Hazle v. Crowfoot*, 727 F.3d 983 (9th Cir. 2013) (Hazle, an atheist, was entitled to damages for having parole revoked due to refusal to participate in AA .)

*Inouye v. Kemna*, 504 F.3d 705 (9th Cir. 2007) (defendant, a Buddhist, entitled to damages for parole revocation based on non-participation in AA when parole officer violated Establishment Clause under “clearly established law” - no immunity.)

*Freedom From Religion Foundation, Inc. v. McCallum*, 324 F.3d 880 (7th Cir. 2003) (permissible for city to fund halfway house for offenders that included AA as part of program because offenders were also offered a secular alternative.)

*Warner v. Orange County Dept. of Probation*, 173 F.3d 120 (2nd Cir. 1999) (*cert denied*) (Probationer entitled to damages for forced attendance at AA meetings as term of probation, with threat of prison if he refused.)

*Kerr v. Farrey*, 95 F.3d 472 (7th Cir. 1996) (requiring inmate to attend a narcotics abuse treatment program based on the 12 steps (the only program available in prison) violated the Establishment Clause. Inmate was required attend meetings or risk a higher security classification and potential adverse effects on parole.)

*Thorne v. Hale*, 1:08cv601 (JCC) (E.D. Va. Mar. 26, 2009) (*unpublished*) (Drug Court program violated Establishment Clause by ordering Thorne to attend AA and jailing him when he refused on religious grounds.)

For a complete list of cases, see the National Drug Court Institute’s website <https://www.ndci.org/law/>.

<sup>2</sup>Zemore SE, Lui C, Mericle A, Hemberg J, Kaskutas LA. A longitudinal study of the comparative efficacy of Women for Sobriety, LifeRing, SMART Recovery, and 12-step groups for those with AUD. *J Subst Abuse Treat.* 2018 May;88:18-26.

This pamphlet provided courtesy of  
Secular Communities for Arizona  
<https://secularaz.org>

## SECULAR ALTERNATIVES to ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

Information for Judges, Probation Officers,  
Drug Courts, and Government Agencies

### **Q: Who should read this pamphlet?**

**A:** Government employees at all levels (federal, state, local) and through various channels (e.g. the criminal justice system, licensing boards, employee assistance programs) who send people to AA for help.

### **Q: Why should I be interested?**

**A:** Courts have held that AA is religious in nature, and that government coercion to participate in it, condition a benefit on participation, or impose punishment for failure to attend, amounts to state sponsorship of religion and violates the Establishment Clause. Further, since this ruling is considered “well-established law,” individuals, not just their employers, can be held civilly liable and ordered to pay damages (no immunity). AA attendance *can* be ordered if there is a secular option available for people who object

to AA on religious grounds.<sup>1</sup>

According to the Pew Research Center's 2014 Religious Landscape Study, 34% of Arizonans between the ages of 18-29 and 40% between the ages of 30-49 identify as "unaffiliated" or "none." Clearly, there is a need for secular recovery.

While many people may not be sophisticated enough to know they have a right to object to AA attendance, their retention and success may be negatively impacted by forced attendance in a program that does not fit with their beliefs.

**Q: What Secular Options Are Available?**

**A:** There are several.

**SMART Recovery**

**LifeRing Secular Recovery**

**Women for Sobriety** (open to all who identify as female)

**Secular Alcoholics Anonymous**  
(some AA meetings are designated as secular just as others are designated as LBGTQ or Young People)

Like AA, these organizations are non-profit and provide peer support for abstinence-based recovery. They offer both face-to-face and online meetings and can provide proof of attendance.

A study published in 2018 comparing 12-step recovery (AA) with the other three secular options listed tentatively concluded that they were equally effective for alcohol use disorder.<sup>2</sup>

**Q: Where Can I Find More Information**

**A:**

[smartrecovery.org](http://smartrecovery.org)

[lifering.org](http://lifering.org)

[womenforsobriety.org](http://womenforsobriety.org)

[aasecular.org](http://aasecular.org)

[azsecularaa.org](http://azsecularaa.org)

Secular AA meetings may also be found in local meeting directories or by using AA's Meeting Guide App.