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ARIZONA'S VOICE FOR
SECULAR GOVERNMENT

Secular AZ news and events



"Arizona State Capitol" by Gage Skidmore

What's the score? Secular AZ's annual [Legislative Scorecard](#) is up! See how your lawmakers voted on secular issues this session and how we ranked them according to their performance on church/state separation overall. Get a full overview of what secular legislation was debated this year, and what bills didn't receive a hearing.

Get happy: The stars are set to shine at our annual Happy Hours honoring our top allies this year in the Legislature. Our Tucson event will take place Sept. 24th, and Tempe on Sept. 26th. Meet our Secular Star lawmakers, eat, drink, and mingle with other Arizonans who want church and state to remain separate. Register before September 15th. Tickets and more information [here](#).

Eat pizza, support separation of church and state: Eat at Blaze Pizza in Phoenix August 29th 4-8pm and they'll donate 20% of the bill to Secular AZ! Just show our flyer available [here](#).



Farewell friend: This month, we celebrated the life of longtime activist and community member Mike Steiner, who chose to end his life on June 27th. Michael spent his last year being very active with several local organizations, including Secular AZ, HSGP, Americans United for Separation of Church and State, FFRF, and Secular Student Alliance. Mike worked tirelessly to make the world a better place. He will be greatly missed.

Statewide secular issues



Victory for secular recovery: Recently, a concerned citizen notified us that the Arizona Health Care Cost Containment System (AHCCCS) was willing to pay for transportation to services

offered by religious groups (i.e. AA, NA, Al-Anon) but would not pay for transportation to services offered by non-religious groups including Women for Sobriety and SOS Tucson.

Attorney Dianne Post, head of Secular AZ's legal committee, contacted AHCCCS to find out why. She pointed out that both federal and Arizona law include protections for non-discrimination on the basis of religion. Unfortunately, AHCCCS refused to share the criteria they use when determining whether a program merits payment for transportation (even though such a tax-funded organization should provide transparency). Ms. Post persisted, demanding to know why AHCCCS was funding religious groups at a rate in excess of non-religious groups.

AHCCCS now says they are "revising" their policy and inviting new service providers to apply for reimbursement of transportation costs. This is great news for non-religious groups that have been turned down in the past or haven't yet applied.

If you are a sobriety group that applies and are turned down, please [contact us](#).

Taking the invocation fight to Scottsdale: Earlier this month, Secular AZ joined Scottsdale residents and HSGP members to ask the Scottsdale Human Relations Commission to consider discussing the removal of prayer/invocations from city council meetings. Scottsdale is currently involved in a lawsuit with The Satanic Temple Arizona Chapter because the religious group was denied the opportunity to give the invocation. Our message to Scottsdale was simple: prayer in government meetings is unnecessary, divisive, and exclusionary, and should be removed from public meeting agendas.



Cut him a (tax) break: Mesa Humanist celebrant Luke Douglas has been making news for his challenge to the IRS to allow secular spiritual leaders to claim a tax break available exclusively to religious clergy. The "parsonage exemption" allows ministers and other religious leaders to skip declaring as taxable income the value of housing allowances provided by their parishes. Douglas plans to be the first Humanist celebrant to test the IRS by claiming the exemption. Read his comments to the Arizona Republic [here](#) and

listen to his recent KJZZ interview on the subject [here](#).



AZ school vouchers make the news again: The awarding of "Empowerment Scholarship Account" money to parents is up 33%, but the Legislature has failed to appropriate administrative funding to the program since the 2012-2013 school year. For the current year, the legislature is providing only about 38% of what it is supposed to under the law. This means long wait times and other disadvantages to families attempting to participate in the program. Meanwhile, the Arizona Auditor General found last year that parents had misspent or fraudulently spent more than \$700,000 in ESA money, in large part because the legislature failed to properly fund the Education Department. Read more [here](#) .

Other national stories of interest

[Loophole found in "In God We Trust" school display law](#)

[Kentucky high school drops 'Bible Literacy' course over constitutional concerns](#)

[Limits on student-led prayers at Greenville school graduations will be challenged](#)

[The Trump Administration Asked The Supreme Court To Legalize Firing Workers Simply For Being Gay](#)

[AP: Trump steadily fulfills goals on religious right wish list](#)

['Outrageous': Trump DOJ Urges Supreme Court to Legalize Firing Workers for Being Transgender](#)

[Christian college suspends transgender student after he undergoes top surgery, citing policy against "sex immorality"](#)

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