

February 3, 2009

Senator Henry L. Marsh III  
Chairman, Senate Courts of Justice  
General Assembly Building  
Room 432  
Capitol Square  
Richmond, Virginia 23219

Dear Senator Marsh:

The Anti-Defamation League (ADL) is one of the nation's oldest civil rights organizations committed to preserving and promoting religious rights and liberties for all Americans. We believe that the separation of church and state, as embodied in the First Amendment of the United States Constitution, safeguards religious liberty because it enables Americans to practice their various religions freely, without government interference, endorsement, or support.

**We are writing to urge your opposition to the passage of Senate Bill 1072: Prayer at Public Events.** The Establishment Clause of the First Amendment dictates that it is inappropriate to have prayers at government sanctioned events. Prayer has been recognized by the Supreme Court as being the quintessential religious practice for many of the world's faiths. Recognizing prayer as inherently religious, both the Supreme Court and lower federal courts have held that prayer at government events is generally prohibited except in the rare circumstance of prayer to open legislative deliberations. Even in that exceptional circumstance, the rule of law is clear that the prayer must be nonsectarian. Senate Bill 1072 not only authorizes prayer at government events, but it prohibits government from providing guidelines to ensure that the prayer is nonsectarian.

The Establishment Clause requires a demarcation between religion and government. Respect for government neutrality towards religion should not be construed as indifference or hostility towards religion. Rather, neutrality respects our Nation's religious pluralism as commanded by the Constitution. The Commonwealth of Virginia is composed of people from all faiths and beliefs, all of whom should be included at government events. Senate Bill 1072 threatens America's fundamental tenets of neutrality and inclusivity. We therefore urge you to **oppose** this bill.

Thank you for your consideration. Please let me know if you have any further questions about the opposition to Senate Bill 1072: Prayer at Public Events.

Sincerely,

David C. Friedman  
Regional Director

cc:// Senator Stephen A Martin, Chief Patron