



Atheist Immigrant Sues to Remove God From U.S. Citizenship Oath

A French atheist woman seeking U.S. citizenship has filed a lawsuit to force the removal of the phrase “so help me God” from the citizenship oath, arguing that it violates the First Amendment’s establishment clause that supposedly separates government from all religious expression.

Olga Paule Perrier-Bilbo, a French national and an avowed atheist who has been in the United States since 2000, claimed that the oath represents a violation of her secularist convictions and makes it impossible for her to comfortably transition to citizenship. “By its very nature, an oath that concludes ‘so help me God’ is asserting that God exists,” reads the lawsuit. “Accordingly, the current oath violates the first 10 words of the Bill of Rights, and to participate in a ceremony which violates that key portion of the United States Constitution is not supporting or defending the Constitution as the oath demands.”

The lawsuit also claims that the appeal to God in the oath “sends the ancillary message to members of the audience that disbelieve in God that they are outsiders, not full members of the political community, and an accompanying message to those that believe in God that they are insiders, favored members of the political community.”

However, on its [website](#) the Department of Homeland Security makes it clear that individuals becoming U.S. citizens are not required to include the phrase “so help me God” in the oath they take, nor are they required to justify why they choose not to seek God’s help.

In 2009, Perrier-Bilbo was offered the option of reciting a Godless oath of citizenship, but staunchly insists in her present lawsuit that such an alternative would make her “feel less than a full new citizen,” and so nothing less than an entire ban of “so help me God” will suffice.

Not surprisingly, Perrier-Bilbo is being represented by atheist attorney Michael Newdow, who has been on the losing end of a number of lawsuits over the mention of God in public proclamations. In 2002 he filed a high-profile federal lawsuit, charging that the phrase “under God” in the Pledge of Allegiance was a violation of the “separation of church and state” and injurious to his atheist daughter, who was exposed to the religious wording during the Pledge’s regular recital at her school. The case dragged on for two years before the U.S. Supreme Court dismissed it in 2004 on procedural grounds.





Written by [Dave Bohon](#) on November 10, 2017

In 2011, Newdow was [rebuffed by the U.S. Supreme Court](#) in his efforts to prevent Barack Obama from uttering the words “so help me God” as he took the presidential oath for his second term. Also in 2011, the High Court refused to hear an appeal to [Newdow’s unsuccessful attempt](#) to have “In God We Trust” stricken from U.S. currency.

As for Newdow’s latest anti-God campaign, legal experts predict that the lawsuit to sanitize the citizenship oath will meet the same deserved end. Erwin Chemerinsky, dean of the UC-Berkeley School of Law and a First Amendment expert, suggested that Newdow’s previous legal defeat in the Pledge of Allegiance case is a fair barometer for his latest scheme. “Courts generally have not been receptive to this in the context of the Pledge of Allegiance,” said Chemerinsky.



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