



Written by [Bob Adelman](#) on June 14, 2020

DOJ Warns Maryland County Officials Against Religious Discrimination

The Justice Department [sent a letter](#) to officials in Montgomery County, Maryland, on Wednesday regarding religious discrimination over the County's enforcement of coronavirus lockdown orders on religious gatherings but not on George Floyd protests.

Wrote Eric Dreiband, an assistant attorney general in the Civil Rights Division of the DOJ:



We write to raise several civil rights concerns....

We applaud the actions you have taken to support peaceful public protest....

We recognize and are duty-bound to enforce the principle that our Constitution requires equal treatment under the laws, without regard to race, religion, or other protected traits....

[Accordingly] government may not discriminate against religious gatherings compared to other nonreligious gatherings.

So, the County's Executive Order that became effective June 1 must be amended because it "prohibits the reported gatherings of hundreds of people for political protest in the Bethesda library and streets," yet those gatherings were allowed anyway, while "it starkly limits religious gatherings," and those limits are being enforced.

Hundreds of people gathered near and around the library without a murmur of protest from county officials while the limits on religious activities, except "drive-in" services, remained in place.

Therefore, continued Dreiband, "We anticipate that you will amend [your Executive Order] to set forth the conditions under which Montgomery County residents may gather peaceably to exercise the full range of rights protected by the First Amendment. We urge you to ensure that your Executive Orders and enforcement of them respect both the right of your residents to assemble to express their views and the right to practice their faith."

According to the letter, "To ... selectively enforce the Order to permit gatherings of more than 10 people for political protest yet deny similar gatherings for religious exercise would raise grave concerns under the Constitution."

Added Dreiband, "Compliance with the First Amendment is not optional and the First Amendment protects both free exercise and assembly rights."

Then came the warning: "Please reach out to United States Attorney Robert Hur regarding any efforts to modify the order discussed above and [to] ensure appropriate protection for the exercise of First Amendment rights, including the timeline for these revisions and the specific steps you plan to undertake."

Huffington Post said Dreiband's warning about the meeting *inside* the Bethesda library was "bogus"



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and made its point by publishing photographs showing hundreds of protestors standing or sitting *outside* the library. HuffPo journalists Carol Kuruvilla and Ryan Reilly stated that no one was inside as the library was closed.

Nothing was said by the journalists about the importance of the executive orders being carefully crafted and equally enforced in order to ensure that precious Constitutional rights were being protected, whether inside a building or outside. All that was implied was that the warning itself was bogus, and just another attempt by the Trump administration to enforce its will on recalcitrant states and municipalities that refuse to toe the administration's line.

The New American will continue to monitor events as they develop in Montgomery County.

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