



AMERICAN ATHEISTS

April 5, 2016

Via Email

Sheriff Eric Watson
Bradley County Sheriff's Office
2290 Blythe Ave.
Cleveland, TN 37311
Dear Sheriff Watson,

On Monday, April 4, 2016, American Atheists Legal Center received several complaints about the Bradley County Sheriff's Office (BCSO) banning commenters and deleting reviews and posts on its official Facebook page. These comments and posts were supportive of the atheist point of view and critical of either the sheriff's office or of your advocating for your own religious beliefs while performing your duties as sheriff.

American Atheists Legal Center (AALC) is part of American Atheists, Inc., a national nonprofit organization dedicated to the separation of religion and government and the equality of atheists. American Atheists has more than 350,000 members and supporters across the country, including residents in Cleveland, Tennessee, and elsewhere in Bradley County, Tennessee.

AALC monitored the BCSO's Facebook page for several hours and witnessed first-hand the deletion of comments that were not positive to Christianity nor to the sheriff as well as those that were positive to atheism. We did not see any obscenity; we merely saw dissent. Additionally, BCSO has disabled the Review function of its Facebook page.

The BCSO has described itself as a "government organization" on Facebook. As is evident by the activity AALC witnessed on April 5, someone from the BCSO is monitoring and curating the Facebook page. As such, the BCSO has committed acts of censorship by deleting non-obscene comments from the public view and banning users from its Facebook page. This means that taxpayer resources in the form of computer(s), energy, and personnel are being used in maintenance of the BCSO's Facebook page,

Therefore, on behalf of a Bradley County resident who wishes to remain anonymous and under the Tennessee Open Records, Tenn. Code Ann. 10-7-503, AALC is making an official public records request to the BCSO for any emails or other electronic correspondence, such as text messages, about its social media sites, including but not limited to Facebook; any electronic records relating to the *Cleveland Daily Banner* story "Atheists condemn Facebook postings" on April 2, 2016, and/or the story's posting on the BCSO's Facebook page on April 3, 2016; any electronic records relating to

comments about the story by BCSO's sheriff and/or employees; electronic records relating to Facebook reviews of the BCSO since the story was published; and/or electronic records relating to atheists or non-Christians since the story was published.

Additionally, per Tenn. Code Ann. Section 10-7-512, AALC would like a copy of the BCSO's written policy on monitoring email communications of employees and a copy of its social media policy pertaining to how comments and messages are to be monitored and curated.

Given your comments to the *Cleveland Daily Banner* that all religious and non-religious points of view are respected, AALC believes that the actions and the policies of the BCSO regarding commenters on its Facebook page are of public interest and will contribute to the public discourse about the role of religion in government business.

If there is a cost to be assessed with the production of these records, please send the breakdown of the labor and hour cost to the address below to be paid promptly. We respectfully request a response within seven (7) business days as required by Tennessee law.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Amanda Knief". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Amanda Knief
National Legal & Public Policy Director
American Atheists, Inc.