

## I'll Be Home(less) for Christmas?

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By Tony Perkins - Family Research Council

In Washington State, grandma didn't get run over by a reindeer -- but her rights sure did! At the Providence Place senior living center, this year's crackdown on Christmas is so severe it makes the Grinch look like an amateur. There are bans on carols, trees, mangers -- and don't even try to say "Merry Christmas!" The message from management is simple: if you want to celebrate the season, move somewhere else.

Like a lot of residents, one woman worried that she'd lose her apartment just for taping cards to the door. So, she contacted an attorney. Now, if Providence Place wants to send seniors packing, they'll have to go through Alliance Defending Freedom to do it. In a letter to Timothy Zariczny, ADF tells the Catholic nonprofit that it ought to read the law before it goes around ruining people's holiday. As Blake Meadows points out, the Establishment Clause is misunderstood enough as it is. But even so, it's a policy for *government* speakers -- not private ones. And because Providence Place isn't a government-controlled entity, the complex isn't bound by it.

For the last several weeks, building managers had been insisting the complex had to censor Christmas because it "accepts funds from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development [HUD]." But that's exactly why it *can* celebrate Christmas! "Americans don't lose their constitutionally protected freedom to say 'Merry Christmas' or otherwise express their faith just because they live in a facility that accepts government money," [said ADF Senior Counsel Matt Sharp](#). "No HUD rule requires senior living centers that accept federal resources to deny their residents the ability to celebrate Christmas with religious songs and symbols."

In fact, ADF points out, HUD has been explicitly supportive of religious expression over the years. The agency has said before that it "continues to strongly support and respect the display of all religious symbols on properties receiving HUD assistance." But it gets better. "We discourage anyone from interfering in the free exercise of religion and prohibiting residents from celebrating the joys of the season," the agency warned. That was 2007. And you can bet that HUD's current secretary, Dr. Ben Carson, would just as fiercely defend religious freedom -- especially under a boss who insisted, "[We're saying Merry Christmas again!](#)"

Obviously, if Providence Place were truly concerned about the separation of church and state, it wouldn't have singled out Christmas for punishment. But that's exactly what managers did. One of the reasons residents were so upset is because the building allowed a menorah in the common space. When people asked why, employees insisted it was a "cultural symbol," not a religious one.

Under this administration, freedom is for everyone. That's why President Trump issued his executive order on religious liberty in the first place. These are exactly the anti-faith attacks his policy was meant to prevent! It's also why leaders like Rep. Doug Lamborn (R-Colo.) make a special effort to push back against the war on faith with [congressional resolutions](#) about the sanctity of Christmas.

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As ADF says, "The right thing to do out of respect for the senior citizens -- many of whom fought or saw their spouses fight in wars to defend our nation and the freedoms upon which it is built -- ...[is to] do away with this terrible policy." Like the White House, they understand that the government's role isn't to be Christmas cops or menorah monitors. In fact, for the past two Decembers, this administration's focus has been about turning the page on eight years of sanitized celebrating. If the president is saying "Merry Christmas" again, then Providence Place should be too!

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*Tony Perkins' Washington Update is written with the aid of FRC senior writers.*