

Federal court pulls over 'I Believe' license plate: Rules plate unconstitutional

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A Christian license plate in South Carolina has been ruled unconstitutional by a federal district court. The license plate showed a cross, stained glass window and the words “I Believe.”

The ruling overturned the state law known as the “I Believe” Act which gave the South Carolina Department of Motor Vehicles authority to issue the license plate.

U.S. District Judge Cameron McGowan Currie held that “such a law amounts to state endorsement not only of religion in general, but of a specific sect in particular.”

The Americans United for Separation of Church and State brought the legal challenge on behalf of four local clergy, as well as the Hindu American Foundation and the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee.

The South Carolina DMV offers more than 100 specialty plates, including one that says “In God We Trust” and another that says “In Reason We Trust,” the latter at the request of a secular humanist group.

The “I Believe” plate is different, according to the court, because it was initiated and approved by government action. State law allows only private organizations to request specially worded plates.

Religion and media analyst Mark Silk, on his Spiritual Politics blog on November 10, noted that South Carolina lawmakers passed the “I Believe” Act at the behest of Lieutenant Governor Andre Bauer.

“I presume that very shortly some private group will come forward” and ask that an “I Believe” plate be made available and it will quickly be seen everywhere on the road, Silk wrote. “But at least [First Amendment architect James] Madison won’t be rolling over in his grave.”