



## YAKIMA VALLEY CONFERENCE OF GOVERNMENTS

311 North 4th Street, Suite 204 • Yakima, Washington 98901  
509-574-1550 • FAX 574-1551

website: [www.yvcog.org](http://www.yvcog.org)

November 20, 2017

Ryan D. Jayne, Esq.  
Freedom from Religion Foundation  
PO Box 750  
Madison, WI 53701

Kyle McCutcheon, Esq.  
Church Alliance  
Alliance Defending Freedom  
15100 N. 90<sup>th</sup> Street  
Scottsdale, AZ 85260

RE: Government funding of a religious organization

Dear Messrs. Jayne and McCutcheon:

I am writing in response to Mr. Jayne's letters dated August 25, and October 25, 2017, and Mr. McCutcheon's letter of October 19, 2017.

In communities across the United States, the faith community is recognized as an important participant within the larger realm of eligible, capable providers of services to and for the homeless. Coordination and association with faith-based organizations is acknowledged and encouraged by both the Washington State Department of Commerce and the Department of Housing and Urban Development in order to bring additional resources to bear on the pervasive problem of homelessness. Lindsay Knotts, Policy Director for the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness, recently posted "Faith-based organizations are often critical partners in ending homelessness in rural communities."

Over the last 10 years, churches within the faith community have been instrumental in providing winter shelters for the homeless in the Yakima Valley by opening their doors from November through March, providing a safe shelter environment. Local faith-based organizations also operate food banks, sponsor clothing drives, and provide hot meals for the homeless.

As the local administrator of state and local homeless funds, the Yakima Valley Conference of Governments (YVCOG) promotes transparency and accountability in our contract management practices. We utilize strong internal controls including monthly invoice review practices to ensure contract compliance. We are diligent in assessing all expenditures to ensure consistency with the secular purpose of the program. For over 50 years, YVCOG has managed both state and federally funded contracts with full compliance and clean audits.

### MEMBER JURISDICTIONS

Grandview • Granger • Harrah • Mabton • Moxee • Naches • Selah  
Sunnyside • Tieton • Toppenish • Union Gap • Wapato • Yakima • Yakima County • Zillah

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Kyle McCutcheon, Esq.

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Funds are granted to qualified agencies who must operate within the terms of the contract. Grants administered to faith-based organizations to provide assistance to homeless populations must ensure secular operations. Public funds may not be used to finance religious activities or any essentially religious endeavors. In addition, YVCOG homeless program staff performs unannounced on-site audits to ensure contract compliance. This may include inspecting facilities/housing for sufficient habitability, discussions with clients to determine if contracted services are being provided, and/or requesting additional documentation from agency staff to support cost reimbursement. To date, we have made three unannounced visits to Camp Hope, a temporary encampment that is managed by the faith-based group Transform Yakima Together. We have witnessed no inappropriate proselytizing, preaching, or religious activities. We have spoken with several clients who have assured us that they are in no way forced to participate in religious services.

In conclusion, our monthly invoice reviews and site visits to Camp Hope have not revealed any instances of using public funds to finance religious activities or any essentially religious endeavors.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Lauris C. Mattson". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "L".

Lauris C. Mattson  
Executive Director