



June 24, 2015

The Honorable Jeh Johnson
Secretary of Homeland Security
Washington, D.C. 20528

Dear Secretary Johnson:

We the undersigned participants and supporters of the Weyrich Lunch write to you with deep concern about the wording of the answer to question 51 on the study materials for the civics portion of the naturalization exam. The question asks students to provide two rights guaranteed to everyone living in the United States, and listed among the possible correct answers is “Freedom of Worship.” We write to you requesting that this answer be immediately corrected to the constitutionally accurate answer—“Freedom of Religion.”

We believe that the wording change we are requesting represents much more than a “distinction without a difference.” Many totalitarian forms of government have allowed for the Freedom of Worship in their governmental documents but in practice severely restricted individual religious freedoms. The phrase Freedom of Worship, as it has been used throughout history, articulates an intentionally limited freedom that restricts a citizen’s rights to the four walls of a government-sanctioned house of worship and only for specific times and events.

This certainly is not how our Founders envisioned the intrinsic rights of all Americans secured by the Constitution. The use of the phrase Freedom of Religion accurately represents the broad freedom guaranteed to every citizen—religious and non-religious alike—to live life in the public square according to the dictates of conscience or religious sensibility. Freedom of Religion is wholly different from Freedom of Worship, in that the former is broad and robust and the latter is narrow and limited.

As a student of history and law, we expect that you already know of the multitude of quotes by our Founders articulating the important differences between these two ideas, so we do not offer them to you to support our case. However, this important distinction is so thoroughly part of the American identity that we want to share with you the words of our First Lady when she called the attendees of the African Methodist Episcopal Church gathering to greater civic involvement.

“Our faith journey isn’t just about showing up on Sunday for a good sermon and good music and a good meal. It’s about what we do Monday through Saturday as well....Jesus didn’t limit his ministry to the four walls of the church, He was out there fighting injustice and speaking truth to power every single day.”

--Address to the African Methodist Episcopal Church, June 28, 2012

We agree with our First Lady and trust that you see the importance of properly articulating this important distinction. We request that the change be made as soon as possible wherever it appears in the naturalization process but especially in the study materials, so that those preparing for and taking the naturalization exam can have an accurate understanding of the foundational freedoms so beautifully expressed in our Constitution.

As Americans, we are thankful that we enjoy Freedom of Religion and not merely Freedom of Worship and wish to secure this idea to all those who join us and to our posterity. Please help restore this idea to its proper place by correcting the naturalization materials.

Sincerely,

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