

Judge rules against "I Believe" license plates in South Carolina

Contributed by Jeff Huett
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A federal district judge has ruled that a state-sponsored Christian license plate distributed in South Carolina is unconstitutional.

The plates, which feature the phrase "I Believe" with a cross over a stained glass window, were designed as a result of the I Believe Act and passed in both houses of the South Carolina legislature before an injunction halted their distribution.

In the ruling, U.S. District Judge Cameron McGowan Currie wrote that "this case presents a textbook example of the need for and continued vitality of the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment to the United States Constitution The United States Supreme Court has repeatedly warned that "government may not promote or affiliate itself with any religious doctrine or organization."

Baptist Joint Committee General Counsel K. Hollyn Hollman applauded the decision.

"Religion never benefits when government starts picking certain groups to receive special treatment," Hollman said. "That's precisely what was going on in South Carolina."

The BJC and others have been quick to point out that the "I Believe" plates are different from other specialty plates. These plates were the product of a special initiative of the South Carolina legislature rather than through the normal Department of Motor Vehicles approval process based on a private application by a private organization.

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