

From: [Lydia Barbash-Riley](#)
To: [Clerk](#)
Subject: Comment for May 18 Board of Commissioners Meeting
Date: Tuesday, May 18, 2021 1:52:45 PM

Dear Leelanau County Board of Commissioners -

I am writing to express my concerns regarding the proposed policy for opening prayers before Board of Commissioners meetings.

I agree with the commenters who have noted that this policy amounts to forcing meeting attendees to witness prayers, and I believe reciting prayers from a specific religious denomination before a meeting is more likely to alienate members of other (or no) religion(s) than it is to "lend gravity to the meeting in a solemn and respectful tone." I am a member of a minority religion (Judaism), and I have absolutely no problem with listening to the prayers of other religions when appropriate - such as when I am participating in a community service activity run by another faith group, or sharing a meal as a guest in a friend's home. But I object to this policy of subjecting each other to prayer in order to participate as citizens in the workings of our local government.

However, the most troubling part of the policy is the procedure for selecting the invocation speaker. Under the current proposal, only congregations with an "established presence" in Leelanau County are eligible for inclusion on the list of acceptable clergy. As far as I am aware, only Christian denominations have established houses of worship here in Leelanau County. Therefore, this policy would appear to exclude not only Jews like me because our synagogue building is located in Traverse City, but every other non-Christian faith. Even if "established presence" were interpreted to mean a faith community whose members resided and worshipped together in Leelanau County without a dedicated building, that would exclude groups without congregations and clergy and faiths of some of the many visitors we welcome to our beautiful County every year. This policy is both unwelcoming and inherently discriminatory against religious minority groups.

Further, the policy also tasks the Clerk with vetting the authenticity of a religious congregation. While I have the utmost respect for our Clerk and the critical work she does for our County, I do not think that verifying the authenticity of a religious group falls within her expertise or the scope of her already many duties.

I strongly encourage the Board to either return to its practice of a moment of silence before meetings, or, at a minimum, allow clergy or representatives of any belief system (including non-deity based groups such as atheists and secular humanists) to provide the invocation.

Leelanau County and its citizens have welcomed me and my family with open arms. Let's not start making folks feel unwelcome or opening the County to unnecessary and completely avoidable social and legal strife with this misguided policy.

Respectfully,
Lydia Barbash-Riley
Cedar, MI