

Council prayers ban upheld in US

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The US Supreme Court has rejected an appeal from the North Carolina County Board who were seeking to overturn a ban on sectarian prayers before public government meetings.

The County Board had previously been found by a lower court to be in violation of the constitutional separation of church and state by opening most of its sessions with a Christian prayer.

The local government had argued that their policy of inviting in private religious leaders to deliver its prayers rather than a paid government employee had opened the opportunity to members of all "faith traditions".

However, the previous court case found that almost 80 percent of the prayers referred to Jesus and that the content was predominately Christian.

In passing the appeal courts earlier ruling, Judge J. Harvie Wilkinson wrote "Sectarian prayers must not serve as the gateway to citizen participation in the affairs of local government."

The local government's prayer policy was challenged by two women who attended a local government board meeting in 2007. Their lawyers include attorneys from the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU).

Katy Parker, legal director for the ACLU's North Carolina chapter said "The law is now settled, and we are very happy that nobody in Forsyth County or anywhere else will feel like a second-class citizen because of what they believe."

The National Secular Society's [legal challenge](#) to prayers during council meetings was recently heard at the High Court and is currently being considered by Mr Justice Ouseley.

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