



February 15, 2017

President Donald Trump  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

Throughout your campaign, you emphasized that preserving religious liberty would be a “first priority” of your Administration. After enduring 8 years of the federal government bullying and punishing good Americans for peacefully living out their faith, your promise motivated many people of faith to cast their vote for you and to trust you to protect religious freedom.

Alliance Defending Freedom, a nonprofit legal organization that specializes in civil liberties litigation and education, has had the privilege of representing many of these Americans whose liberties have been under attack. Today, we write on behalf of our clients, Donald and Ellen Vander Boon, who own West Michigan Beef Company, LLC, a meatpacking facility near Grand Rapids, Michigan. This family-owned business employs 45 hard-working Americans and helps put food on the table for many families across the Midwest. Don and Ellen are also devout Christians whose faith guides them in how they operate their business, such as making sure that their employees are treated fairly and well. Unfortunately, the Vander Boons are at risk of having their plant shut down and their employees left jobless because of the USDA’s unfair targeting of the Vander Boons for their religious beliefs.

In August 2015, Don Vander Boon placed on a breakroom table an article he had read that expressed the view held by diverse cultures and faiths that God designed marriage as a special relationship between a man and a woman. Within an hour, an on-site USDA inspector saw the article and removed it. USDA officials then cornered Don in his office and demanded that he keep the article out of his business’ breakroom. The USDA officials claimed that the article was offensive and harassing under expanded agency rules. Don pointed out that the Constitution is supposed to protect and respect the beliefs expressed by everyone, including private, family-owned business owners. The federal officials didn’t care. They told Don that he had to leave his religious beliefs at the door. And they threatened to immediately stop all inspections—which would result in Don and Ellen’s company shutting down—unless Don kept religious articles the USDA officials deemed “offensive” out of the breakroom.

Don filed a formal complaint with the USDA. But 18 months have passed, and Don has not received any relief from this unjust and unlawful targeting of his religious expression by the federal government. He remains under a constant threat of closure, nervous about saying or doing something that might result in the USDA censoring his religious beliefs, silencing his speech, and forcing Ellen and him to close down their only source of income that benefits their family, their 45 employees, and the broader community. We therefore ask that you direct the Department of Agriculture to rescind its unlawful harassment policy and lift the restriction on Don’s speech.

Don's situation also highlights how much similar people who own small, family-owned businesses would directly benefit from the religious freedom executive order you are considering. Your signing that order will ensure that hard-working Americans, along with non-profits and social service organizations, will not have to fear government punishment or bullying simply for peacefully living out their faith. On behalf of Don and Ellen, we ask you to please sign the religious freedom executive order.

ALLIANCE DEFENDING FREEDOM

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Michael Farris". The signature is written in a cursive style with a prominent initial "M" and a long, sweeping tail on the "s".

Michael P. Farris  
President, CEO & General Counsel