

Complaint filed against Tammy Kemp, judge who offered Bible to Botham Jean's killer after sentencing

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Texas judge Tammy Kemp offered a Bible to Amber Guyger after sentencing her October 1 for the murder of her neighbor, Botham Jean. The next day, the Freedom from Religion Foundation filed a letter of complaint with a Texas judicial conduct commission.

Kemp sentenced Guyger, a police officer, to ten years in prison. Shortly before, Brandt Jean, brother of the victim, had hugged Guyger and told her he forgave her.

The FFRF, a watchdog group that works to protect the separation of church and state, said the judge's actions were "inappropriate and unconstitutional" because she was acting in an official rather than a private role.

"She was in a government courtroom, dressed in a judicial robe, with all of the imprimatur of the state, including armed law enforcement officers, preaching to someone who was quite literally a captive audience, and even instructing her on which bible verses to read!" wrote Dan Barker and Annie Laurie Gaylor, FFRF copresidents, in a letter to the State Commission on Judicial Conduct.

"We understand that it was an emotional moment, particularly when the victim's brother, Brandt Jean, publicly forgave and hugged Guyger," wrote the FFRF officials.

"It is perfectly acceptable for private citizens to express their religious beliefs in court, but the rules are different for those acting in a governmental role."

Others praised the judge for her actions. "FFRF is protesting Judge Kemp rather than joining the rest of the nation celebrating the compassion and mercy Judge Kemp demonstrated," said Hiram Sasser, general counsel of First Liberty Institute. "We should all be thankful the law allows Judge Kemp's actions and we stand with her and will gladly lead the charge in defending her noble and legal actions."

Footage from a Law and Crime Network video, whose link FFRF included in its complaint, shows Kemp crossing the courtroom, Bible in hand, to where Guyger was

seated. “This is the one I use every day,” she can be heard saying. “This is your job for the next month. You read right here: John 3:16. And this is where you start, ‘For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whosoever.’ You stop at ‘whosoever’ and say, ‘Amber.’”

At some points in the face-to-face conversation, Guyger nods. Kemp hugs her twice during the exchange, which lasted more than four minutes.

Asked what kind of action FFRF was hoping the commission might take, Gaylor told Religion News Service: “We would trust the commission to determine any sanctions, but we would certainly like to see a pronouncement that this behavior crossed an ethical line and was improper.” —Religion News Service