



LICENSE TO ROAM :  
VANITY LICENSE PLATES AND THE GR8 STORIES THEY TELL™  
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## GOVERNOR SANFORD ALLOWS CHRISTIAN LICENSE PLATE TO BECOME LAW; LAWSUIT LIKELY AGAINST SOUTH CAROLINA

CROTON-ON-HUDSON, NY – "Yesterday, Governor Mark Sanford allowed South Carolina to become the first state to issue the Christian **I BELIEVE** special license plate, and a lawsuit is sure to follow," said Stefan Lonce, the author of the forthcoming book, *LCNS2ROM – LICENSE TO ROAM: VANITY LICENSE PLATES AND THE GR8 STORIES THEY TELL*. *LCNS2ROM* examines the vanity and specialty license plate phenomenon.

Governor Sanford neither signed nor vetoed S. 1329, which authorizes the **I BELIEVE** plate, and it become law without his signature. S. 1329 requires the new special license plate to have the slogan **I BELIEVE**, and images of a cross and a church stained glass window.

In a letter to the leaders of the South Carolina Senate, Governor Sanford wrote, "While I do, in fact, 'believe' – it is my personal view that the largest proclamation of one's faith ought to be in how one lives one's life. Galatians talks of the fruit of the spirit as peace, patience, kindness, gentleness and more... if God is working in one's life, these things say what no license plate will ever say."

In an op-ed article posted on [thestate.com](http://www.thestate.com) on May 31st, Lonce wrote, "I respect the strongly held beliefs of the **I BELIEVE** plate sponsors.... Governor Sanford is famously frugal with taxpayer dollars, and should consider that the **I BELIEVE** plate would raise no revenue, but would cost the state to defend in court. License plates reflect our values, and our politics." [Online at: <http://www.thestate.com/satopinion/story/420319.html>]

In a May 13th news story, Dr. Jeremy Gunn, the director of the American Civil Liberties Union's religious freedom project, told Associated Press reporter Jim Davenport, "The South Carolina Legislature should not be in the business of telling people how or when to pray, whether to pray or to whom to pray."

Marc Stern of the American Jewish Congress wrote to Gov. Sanford on May 20th, urging him to veto the **I BELIEVE** plate, asserting that it is unconstitutional, and the state would lose in court. According to Mr. Stern, "The cost of the litigation ... is a waste of taxpayer money."

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"South Carolina taxpayers would have to pay to defend the plate in court, unless a legal defense fund were organized," Lonce said, in a June 3rd posting on Will Folks's blog, fitsnews.com. [Online at: <http://www.fitsnews.com/2008/06/03/sanford-mum-on-controversial-license-plate/>]

South Carolina will not charge any additional fee for the **I BELIEVE** plate. At least 400 South Carolina motorists must request the **I BELIEVE** plate, or a deposit of \$4,000 must be paid, before the Department of Motor Vehicles will begin issuing the plate.

The economic slowdown has hit South Carolina hard, forcing the General Assembly to cut the state budget. Governor Sanford recently vetoed \$72 million from the \$7 billion state budget. The South Carolina Senate overrode \$70.1 million of the vetoed appropriations yesterday, exacerbating the state's budget woes.

Special license plates are no stranger to the courtroom. The U.S. Court of Appeals, in *Planned Parenthood of South Carolina v. Rose*, has enjoined South Carolina from issuing the legislatively-enacted **CHOOSE LIFE** special plate, which has a pro-life, anti-abortion, message. Under a law passed after South Carolina lost the *Rose* case, the DMV can approve new special license plates, and it will issue a **CHOOSE LIFE** plate.

"The Supreme Court has held that the First Amendment applies to license plates. The new **I BELIEVE** plate will be even more controversial than the **CHOOSE LIFE** plate. It's a sure bet that South Carolina will be sued over the **I BELIEVE** plate," Lonce said.

South Carolina currently issues college, NASCAR, and other special license plates, including plates for such causes as organ donations. Organizations typically sponsor special license plates, and usually receive some of the extra fees that motorists pay for most special plates.

No organization sponsored the South Carolina **I BELIEVE** plate, however, which could have ominous legal implications. No organization had sponsored the **CHOOSE LIFE** plate, which was one of the reasons why the U.S. Court of Appeals prohibited South Carolina from issuing that plate.

In most states, special license plates can be vanitized with messages created by motorists, but not in South Carolina. Standard South Carolina plates can be vanitized with messages created by motorists of up to seven characters, for a \$30 fee. According to the *American Association of Motor Vehicle Administrators-LCNS2ROM Vanity License Plates Survey*, South Carolina has 45,214 vanitized motor vehicles (representing 1.35 % of registered motor vehicles). The complete *Survey* results are at [www.LCNS2ROM.com](http://www.LCNS2ROM.com).

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