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Settlement affirms VA religious groups free to operate according to beliefs

ADF attorneys favorably settle lawsuit on behalf of two churches, three religious schools, pregnancy center network

Monday, Mar 18, 2024

ALEXANDRIA, Va. – In settlement of a lawsuit that Alliance Defending Freedom attorneys filed on behalf of two Virginia churches, three Christian schools, and a pregnancy center network, Virginia officials have acknowledged that commonwealth law protects the religious organizations’ ability to operate consistent with their faith.

As part of the settlement agreement in *Calvary Road Baptist Church v. Miyares*, Virginia officials conceded that all of the ministries, as religious organizations, are free to only hire “individuals who profess and live according to religious beliefs held by [the ministries], including beliefs on abortion, marriage, sexuality, sex, and gender.” Further, Virginia officials agreed that commonwealth law protects the ministries from having to pay for or facilitate any gender dysphoria treatment that violates their religious teachings. Examples include puberty blockers, cross-sex hormones, so-called “sex reassignment” surgeries, or any other “gender transition” procedures.

“Religious organizations are free to operate their ministries without fear of government punishment, and Virginia’s law protects that foundational right,” said ADF Senior Counsel Kevin Theriot. “Our clients are motivated by their faith to offer spiritual guidance, education, pregnancy support, and athletic opportunities to their communities. The commonwealth must respect their right—just like anyone else’s—to continue operating by their own internal policies and codes of conduct about life, marriage, and sexuality.”

ADF attorneys filed the lawsuit in September 2020 on behalf of Calvary Road Baptist Church, Community Fellowship Church, Community Christian Academy, and Care Net to challenge a Virginia law that forced nonprofit ministries to abandon their core convictions in hiring and other policies or face fines up to \$100,000 for each violation.

The Virginia Values Act, enacted in July 2020, compelled churches, religious schools, and Christian ministries to hire employees who do not share their beliefs on marriage, sexuality, and gender identity—and even banned them from publishing their biblical beliefs on these topics. A companion law required the ministries and others like them to include in employee health care plans coverage for “sex reassignment” and “gender affirming” surgeries that run contrary to their beliefs. It also prohibited the ministries from offering sex-specific Bible studies and youth activities.

In light of the settlement, ADF attorneys filed a dismissal of the case with the Loudoun County Circuit Court Friday.

- Pronunciation guide: Theriot (TAIR’-ee-oh)

Alliance Defending Freedom is an alliance-building, non-profit legal organization committed to protecting religious freedom, free speech, parental rights, and the sanctity of life.

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