

DoD Sued by Shields of Strength for Banning Bible Verses on Military Tags

The faith-based seller of military-themed dog tags engraved with inspirational Bible verses has been cleared to pursue a lawsuit against the Department of Defense after the Pentagon halted its production effort.

As CBN News reported, the DoD prohibited Shields of Strength from producing or selling licensed items with religious content after receiving a cease-and-desist letter from the Military Religious Freedom Foundation, an anti-religious group, in 2019.

Kenny Vaughn and his wife, Tammie, had been producing the inspirational dog tags for 20 years without issue until MRFF demanded they stop.

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The anti-religion group sent letters to the Pentagon, the Army and Marines complaining about the Bible-based product.

“The letter of the law states that you cannot do this because that would be in this case breaching the separation of church and state and applying, in this case, an endorsement by the Department of Defense and military branches on a clearly proselytizing message,” said MRFF.

After reviewing the complaint, the Marines and the Army sent Vaughan cease and desist letters. One of them said in part, that it could not “...tolerate merchandise that had a) Marine Corps trademarks and b) a religious theme. This is in direct violation of the Department of Defense Instruction.

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“Further, please refrain from submitting items for approval that are clearly of a religious nature and which bear USMC trademarks,” the letter continued.

First Liberty, a non-profit legal group, filed the lawsuit on Dec. 14, 2021, calling the Pentagon’s move “arbitrary and capricious and an abuse of discretion.” It also stated that the military violated the First Amendment’s right to religious liberty.

“This lawsuit may set precedence to protect against First Amendment restrictions for Christians serving in uniform and to protect Christian-owned businesses against unfair trademark practices by the federal government,” reads a 2021 statement on the SoS website.

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