

Dr. Eric Walsh: No, Georgia, You Can't Have My Bible

Tuesday, a former employee of the Georgia Department of Public Health—who is suing the state after evidence suggested he was fired because of his religious beliefs—announced he would not comply with a State of Georgia demand to produce materials he used as a lay minister in his church.

The state of Georgia, in preparation for its defense, demanded Dr. Eric Walsh turn over copies of his sermon notes and transcripts—even his personal Bible.

“The state insists that it did not fire Dr. Walsh over his religious beliefs or sermons,” First Liberty Institute Senior Counsel Jeremy Dys, who is one of his attorneys, said. “If that’s true, why is it demanding copies of his sermons now? It’s clear the government fired Dr. Walsh over his religious beliefs, which is blatant religious discrimination.”

As has been previously reported, Walsh had a stellar professional record when he was hired in May 2014 as a district health director for the Georgia DPH. A week later, he was asked to submit copies of sermons he had previously preached as a lay minister with a Seventh-day Adventist church in California, where he had previously lived.

Email correspondence between DPH officials and department employees shows the sermons were divided up and reviewed. Two days later, the State of Georgia terminated Dr. Walsh’s employment.

First Liberty Institute, along with Atlanta law firm Parks, Chesin & Walbert, filed a lawsuit against the Georgia DPH on his behalf, charging state officials with engaging in religious discrimination against Walsh.

On Sept. 28, in the process of building their legal case against Walsh, the State of Georgia served a Request for Production of Documents—similar to a subpoena in a criminal case—requiring Walsh to turn over his notes, transcripts and Bible. First Liberty Institute is resisting the request on First Amendment grounds.

Dys said any government entity demanding a pastor hand over copies of all of his sermons—including notes and transcripts—without limitation is an “excessive display” of government over-reach. He said it violates the sanctity of the church.

“No government has the right to require a pastor to turn over his sermons,” Walsh added. “I cannot and will not give up my sermons unless I am forced to do so.”

Tony Perkins of the Family Research Council is also coming to Walsh’s defense. He has called on his organization’s members to show their support, as well.

“Apparently, not even the margin notes of a Christian’s Bible are off limits from the government’s intimidation machine,” he wrote in an email to FRC members. “Unless Georgia state officials are looking for devotional inspiration for how better to treat their fellow citizens, this type of intrusion is nothing more than an intimidation tactic.

“FRC stands with Dr. Walsh and any other pastor who is targeted by the government because of what is said in the pulpit. Please join me in signing our petition to Georgia Gov. Nathan Deal urging him to correct this egregious over-reach of the state into church affairs.”

[Click here to read and sign the FRC petition.](#)