

NJ Judge Wants Ministry to Allow Lesbian Civil Union Ceremony

The U.S. Supreme Court gave Christians a victory this week when it ruled that churches could select its own ministers. But churches in New Jersey are facing a new challenge.

A New Jersey administrative law judge on Thursday recommended that the state's Division on Civil Rights find the Ocean Grove Camp Meeting Association in violation of a state nondiscrimination law.

Specifically, the judge concluded that the ministry violated the law when it declined to allow two women to hold a "**civil union**" ceremony at its beachside pavilion, one of the ministry's privately owned **places of worship**.

Alliance Defense Fund (ADF) attorneys representing the ministry say they are considering their next steps in the case and argue that the ministry is simply exercising its constitutionally protected right to use its private property in a way that is consistent with its **religious beliefs**.

"The government should not be able to force a private Christian organization to use its property in a way that would violate its own religious beliefs," says ADF Litigation Staff Counsel Jim Campbell. "Religious groups have the right to use their private property in a way that is consistent with their beliefs. That right, protected by both the New Jersey and U.S. constitutions, obviously trumps any law enacted by the state's legislature."

A judge with the State of New Jersey Office of Administrative Law issued the ruling in *Bernstein v. Ocean Grove Camp Meeting Association*. The director of the New Jersey Division on Civil

Rights can adopt, modify or reject the ruling within 45 days. If the director doesn't act, the ruling becomes final at that time.