

Atlanta Refusing to Bow to the Name of Jesus

A federal judge on Wednesday weighed the merits of a nationally watched discrimination lawsuit involving Atlanta's former fire chief, who was fired for handing out at work 20 copies of a book he wrote that is critical of homosexuality.

City officials are seeking the dismissal of a lawsuit filed by Kelvin Cochran in a case that sparked outrage among some conservative groups advocating for religious freedom.

In the 2013 book, "Who Told You That You Were Naked?", Cochran called homosexuality "vulgar" and "the opposite of purity." He was fired early this year after employees complained to city council members about the book's content, Atlanta city attorney Robert N. Godfrey said.

"The city of Atlanta has a policy of non-discrimination," Godfrey said in court. "This book runs completely afoul of those principles."

U.S. District Court Judge Leigh May said during Wednesday's hearing that there had not yet been time for depositions in the lawsuit filed in February, suggesting she was not ready to throw it out. But she did not immediately issue a ruling.

Cochran is seeking to return to his job with back pay.

Cochran's attorney Kevin Theriot argued that the city fired the chief simply because of his religious beliefs, violating his First Amendment rights to free speech and religion.

"He has never discriminated against anyone or been accused of discriminating against anyone," said Theriot, who works for the non-profit Christian group, Alliance Defending Freedom.

Theriot noted that most of the books that Cochran gave away at work were to employees who asked for copies. {eo}

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