

Billy Graham Association Seeks to Dismiss Discrimination Suit

The Billy Graham Evangelistic Association (BGEA) is defending itself against a lawsuit filed by an African-American woman who claims she was fired after complaining that the organization was not reaching out to black churches.

In a motion to dismiss the case filed on Wednesday, attorneys for the Charlotte, ministry said the BGEA never discriminated against Kimberly McCallum.

The motion argues that the lawsuit should be thrown out because McCallum failed to contend that the job she lost remained open or was given to another person-which is often a key to discrimination cases-and because churches have autonomy that prevents the courts from interfering in ministries' internal affairs, the Associated Press (AP) reported.

"Such an inquiry by the courts would be an impermissible entanglement into the affairs of a religious organization," the attorneys wrote, according to the AP.

McCallum said she was abruptly fired in 2007 after complaining that a list of 635 prospective church partners included only three predominantly black congregations. In her complaint, filed in June and recently moved to federal court, McCallum claims black churches intentionally were excluded from the document.

She said BGEA leaders blocked her from getting other jobs in the organization and revoked a subsequent job offer. McCallum seeks to be reinstated to her job and to receive back pay.

In a statement, the BGEA said it could not discuss the

specifics of the lawsuit but disagreed with McCallum's allegations. "The BGEA provides equal employment opportunities to people of all races," the statement said. "The organization continues to be inclusive of all people regardless of race, gender or nationality in all of the ministry's activities worldwide."

BGEA spokesman Mark DeMoss told the AP it was "preposterous" to claim African-Americans would intentionally be excluded from participating in the organization. Leaders at the ministry—founded by Billy Graham in 1950 and now led by his son Franklin—said two prominent black pastors from the Minneapolis-St. Paul area recently partnered with the BGEA to lead an evangelistic youth event there.

Graham launched his ministry when segregation was still practiced, but opened his crusades to all races years before desegregation laws passed. Now 90, Graham has faced a host of health problems in recent years and spends most of his time at his home in North Carolina.