

California Churches Seek Immediate Relief From Worship Restrictions

Liberty Counsel has filed an emergency injunction pending appeal to the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals on behalf of Harvest Rock Church and Harvest International Ministry against California Gov. Gavin Newsom's remaining worship restrictions.

Along with the brief, Liberty Counsel included a chart which clearly shows the remaining unconstitutional restrictions on places of worship.

On February 6, 2021, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in favor of these churches by enjoining California's total ban on indoor worship. This was the second time Liberty Counsel appealed to the high court on behalf of these churches. The ruling also included South Bay United Pentecostal Church.

Then, Newsom issued a revised "Blueprint" in which he removed the total worship ban in Tier 1 and replaced it with a 25% building capacity limit. Tier 2 also has a 25% building capacity and Tiers 3-4 have a 50% capacity. The 9th Circuit Court of Appeals previously struck down the 100- and 200-person cap in Tiers 2 and 3. The "Blueprint" continues to restrict singing and chanting in churches throughout the state.

Liberty Counsel now requests relief from these restrictions while waiting for oral argument and a decision at the 9th Circuit Court. However, while discriminating against churches, the governor's "Blueprint" exempts food packaging and processing, laundromats, warehouses, logistics, warehousing facilities, health care facilities, emergency services, transportation and logistics, bus stations, train stations, airports, passenger rail, energy facilities, water facilities,

communications and information technology workers, radio, television and media organizations, critical manufacturing, financial services, banks, law firms, real estate firms, accounting firms, chemical manufacturing plants, defense industrial sector businesses and operations, and government operations from all numerical or capacity restrictions whatsoever.

In last Friday's IPA, the churches argue, "Appellants have been subject to complete prohibitions and severe restrictions for ten months, have been forced to choose between jail and attending church on the Holy Day of Easter and the Day of Pentecost, missed another Holy Season of Christmas, and are now going through yet another Holy Season of Palm Sunday and Easter while under the constant threat of criminal sanction for violating the Governor's unconstitutional restrictions on their religious worship services. Enough is enough. How many sacred religious holidays and Holy Seasons must Appellants' endure before this Court will finally shut down the unconstitutional, unconscionable, and unending government discrimination in California? ... Appellants' injury is worse, as they have been suffering the unconscionable and unconstitutional injury of discriminatory worship prohibitions and restrictions for 259 days. The time has come for the Governor's unconstitutional reign of executive discrimination against religious worship to meet its rightful place in the dustbin of constitutional history. Appellants have suffered long enough."

Liberty Counsel founder and chairman Mat Staver said, "We will not rest until all of California's discriminatory schemes are removed and churches and pastors no longer face enormous fines and threats of jail. Churches and places of worship have always been essential and are now more essential than ever."
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