

Christian Fire Chief Kelvin Cochran Files Wrongful Termination Lawsuit

Atlanta's ex-fire chief sued the city on Wednesday, seeking to get his job back after being ousted for writing a book critical of homosexuality, claiming he was terminated in violation of his rights to freedom of religion and speech.

Kelvin Cochran's case has become a rallying point for conservatives and same-sex marriage opponents, who see his firing as an attack on religious freedom. In a 2013 book, he called homosexuality "vulgar" and "the opposite of purity."

"I was fired simply because of what I believe," Cochran told reporters on Wednesday. "It's unjust and it's unconstitutional."

In the lawsuit, Cochran says the city violated his First Amendment rights to freedom of speech and religion. He seeks to return to his old job with back pay, but not other monetary damages or legal fees.

In a separate action, he has also filed a federal discrimination complaint with the Equal Opportunity Employment Commission.

Atlanta Mayor Kasim Reed has said the fire chief was dismissed not because of religion, but over questions about his judgment and managerial abilities that were raised by the book titled: "Who Told You That You Were Naked?"

City policy forbids discrimination over sexual orientation, said Reed, explaining that Cochran's published views represented a legal liability.

The mayor's office plans to fight the lawsuit, as well as the

federal discrimination suit, said spokeswoman Jenna Garland, noting that Cochran had also improperly distributed the book in the workplace.

“Religious beliefs cannot shield any employee from the consequences of poor judgment and insubordination,” Garland said in an email.

Cochran, 55, was named Atlanta fire chief in 2008. The next year, he was nominated by President Barack Obama to serve as U.S. Fire Administrator, spending 10 months in that job before returning to the Atlanta fire chief position.

After his firing last month, Cochran gained the support of the Alliance Defending Freedom, a Christian legal group representing him in the legal action against the city.

Last week, members of Georgia’s congressional delegation sent Reed a letter urging him to reinstate Cochran.

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