

California Policy Change Excluding Church Food Programs

A church and preschool in California have been suspended from participating in a federal food program, prompting an attorney to label it as a “really disturbing example... of religious discrimination.”

Jeremiah Galus, senior counsel for Alliance Defending Freedom (ADF), expressed concerns about the Church of Compassion and Dayspring Learning Center, which primarily serves an immigrant population.

For nearly 20 years, the church and preschool have been part of a federal food program administered by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and the California Department of Social Services. However, following new nondiscrimination provisions implemented by California state officials in accordance with USDA guidance, the church and school now face two policy implementations that contradict their religious beliefs.

According to Galus, the church and preschool are being pressured to relinquish their right to hire employees who share their faith and live out their religious convictions.

Furthermore, they are prohibited from aligning their internal policies with their religious beliefs on sexuality, which would require them to compromise on issues such as restroom usage based on biological sex. This puts the church and school in a difficult position, as they are being asked to compromise their Christian principles to continue participating in the program.

Galus emphasized that the church and preschool aim to teach children about Jesus and foster a relationship with their

Creator. To achieve this, they need staff members who understand and share their beliefs. However, California's Department of Social Services is accused of denying religious exemptions to the church and school.

By standing firm in their Christian convictions, the Church of Compassion and Dayspring Learning Center have been deemed ineligible for the government food program. While the church has no problem with the Title IX prohibition of sex discrimination, the USDA reinterpreted the law in 2022 to include sexual orientation and gender identity.

Galus clarified that the church and preschool serve all families, including those who identify as LGBTQ. They welcome everyone while maintaining their Christian values. The violation of rights, according to Galus, lies with the state and federal officials, not the church or preschool.

The Alliance Defending Freedom has filed an amended complaint and a motion for preliminary injunction, aiming to reinstate the Church of Compassion and Dayspring Learning Center in the USDA program without compromising their biblical beliefs.

Their goal is to ensure that children are served and fed while allowing families to choose religious education without facing discrimination or exclusion from government programs.

The exclusion from the program has imposed significant financial burdens on the church, costing thousands of dollars each month. A court hearing on the matter has been scheduled for August 11.

Dean Broyles, an attorney representing the church, criticized the government's handling of the situation, calling it deeply immoral. He argued that the state of California is holding hungry children hostage in an attempt to control the church's religious beliefs and employment practices, which have no bearing on effectively providing food to those in need. {eoa}

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