

Claiming Religious Discrimination, Air Traffic Controller Sues FAA

A Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) employee has filed charges against his employer and the National Air Traffic Controllers Association (NATCA) union, alleging religious discrimination.

Matthew Gray, with the help of National Right to Work Foundation staff attorneys, filed charges with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) and the Federal Labor Relations Authority, claiming that union and FAA officials used his religious beliefs to punish him after he decided to resign from the union.

Gray, a Seventh-day Adventist, currently works at the FAA's Potomac facility. After resigning his membership in NATCA because he believes union membership is contrary to his faith, Gray was informed by a union official on Feb. 6 that he was being removed from his detail and transferred to another in which he would have to work on Saturdays as punishment for resigning from the union.

Instead of standing up to the union, Gray's manager told him he was complying with the union's transfer request because Gray "no longer represent[s] the best interests of NATCA."

A central doctrine of Gray's church is weekly worship and not working on Saturdays. Gray's old position allowed him to avoid any scheduling conflict between his work and religious obligations. By removing him from his old detail, however, union officials are effectively forcing Gray to work on Saturdays, find a replacement every week or lose his job.

Gray told union officials he only resigned from the union

because of his religious beliefs and that the transfer would cause a scheduling conflict with his religious obligations. NATCA ignored his objections and went through with the transfer request.

“It’s unconscionable that an independent-minded worker was punished for attempting to exercise his deeply held religious beliefs,” says Patrick Semmens, vice president of the National Right to Work Foundation. “Workers shouldn’t face retaliation for exercising their right not to join or affiliate with a labor union.”

“We hope the EEOC and the Federal Labor Relations Authority will quickly step in and safeguard Matthew Gray’s religious beliefs,” Semmens adds.