

Federal Judge Makes Ruling in Lawsuit Against Trump's Religious Liberty Commission

A federal judge dismissed a lawsuit Monday that sought to declare President Trump's Religious Liberty Commission unlawful, handing the White House a clean victory on one of its signature faith-based initiatives.

U.S. District Judge John Cronan, a Trump appointee serving on the federal bench in New York City, rejected claims by a coalition of progressive Muslim and Hindu groups that the commission improperly excluded non-Judeo-Christian faiths. In a 49-page opinion, Cronan found the panel's composition satisfied legal requirements for balance, even if not every religious tradition is represented.

"Its members include workers in the public, private, and nonprofit sectors, have widely varying life experiences, are religious leaders as well as rank-and-file congregants, and encompass adherents of at least five different religions," Cronan wrote.



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The coalition, represented by Democracy Forward, argued the commission's makeup violated federal law requiring advisory bodies to be "fairly balanced." The judge was not persuaded.

"Given the wide diversity of Christian and Jewish beliefs, there is no reason to think that an Evangelical member would 'balance out' a Catholic member any less than a Buddhist member would," Cronan wrote. He also ruled that one of the plaintiffs, an ordained minister who runs an interfaith group, lacked legal standing to bring claims at all.

Trump established the Religious Liberty Commission last year after raising concerns about anti-Christian discrimination across American institutions. The commission is chaired by former Texas Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick and vice-chaired by Ben Carson, who served as Trump's Housing and Urban Development secretary during his first term. Members also include New York Cardinal Timothy Dolan and the Rev. Franklin Graham, son of the late Billy Graham.

The commission released a draft report last month calling for "building bridges between church and state." It was formally presented to Trump in the Oval Office.

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