

Hobby Lobby Loses Contraception Fight in Federal Appeals Court

A federal appeals court on Thursday rejected a claim by an arts and crafts chain that wants to be exempted from a requirement to provide emergency contraceptives to employees because it violates the religious principles of its owners.

The Court of Appeals in Denver ruled against family-owned Hobby Lobby's assertion that the religious beliefs of its owners should relieve them from providing the "morning after" and "week after" pills to their employees, as required under President Barack Obama's signature health care reforms.

Hobby Lobby vowed to appeal to the U.S. Supreme Court.

"The Green family is disappointed with this ruling," said Kyle Duncan, general counsel for the Becket Fund for Religious Liberty, which is assisting Hobby Lobby in the legal case. "The Greens will continue to make their case on appeal that this unconstitutional mandate infringes their right to earn a living while remaining true to their faith."

The medications at issue are classified as emergency contraceptives by the Food and Drug Administration, but the owners of Hobby Lobby call them "abortion-inducing drugs" because they are often taken after conception.

The lawsuit is among 42 legal actions that have been filed over the issue, according to the Becket Fund for Religious Liberty, a non-profit law firm in Washington, D.C.

The company faces fines of up to \$1.3 million daily if it disobeys the mandate, which takes effect on January 1 for Hobby Lobby, a \$3 billion chain, and its smaller sister operation, Mardel, a Christian-oriented bookstore and

educational supply company.

Both companies are owned by the Green family of Oklahoma City, whose patriarch, David Green, is ranked 79th on Forbes Magazine's list of the 400 richest Americans, with a net worth of \$4.5 billion.

The family operates 514 Hobby Lobby stores in 41 states and employ 13,240 people. Inspirational Christian music is played in the stores, which are closed on Sundays.

U.S. District Judge Joe Heaton of the Western District of Oklahoma ruled on November 19 that the privately-owned companies are secular, for-profit enterprises that do not possess the same religious rights as the individual members of the family.

Editing by Corrie MacLaggan and Lisa Shumaker.

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