

Judge Blocks Mom from Taking Daughter to Church Services

A Maine judge's court order prevented a mother from taking her own daughter to Christmas church services.

Now the Maine Supreme Judicial Court is set to weigh in on whether the lower court overstepped its limits when it barred Emily Bickford from reading the Bible to her 12-year-old daughter or taking her to church for over a year.

The state's high court heard oral arguments last month in the case of Bickford v. Bradeen – a battle between judicial authority and parental rights. Liberty Counsel, a faith-based non-profit legal group, is representing Bickford. She is challenging a December 2024 custody order that prohibits her from bringing her daughter, Ava, to Calvary Chapel in Portland, Maine.

According to Liberty Counsel, Ava's parents were never married, but Bickford maintained primary custody of Ava, while her father had visitation rights.

After attending Calvary Chapel for three years, young Ava decided to be baptized. She shared the exciting news with her father. However, the news reportedly enraged him.

Liberty Counsel contends that the father found "an ACLU judge" and "flew in a Marxist former sociology professor from California" to testify that Calvary Chapel or any Bible-believing churches, for that matter, are "cults" that are "psychologically detrimental."

The Portland District Court sided with Ava's father and found that Bickford is "a fit parent except for the fact that she is a Christian," explained Liberty Counsel in a press statement.

The judge ruled that Bickford could not take her daughter to any church unless the father approved of it. Liberty Counsel claims that the order is so broad that if enforced, it can make it so that the young girl cannot associate with any of her church friends or any member of Calvary Chapel Portland. If she meets new friends and they decide to attend the church, she allegedly would have to cut ties with them.

Also, she reportedly cannot attend any Christmas, Easter or any other Christian event or celebration at any church, including any wedding, funeral, or even hospital visits with anyone associated with Calvary Chapel. Ava is not allowed to have contact with any religious organization nor read the Bible or religious literature.

"Ava wants to attend church and be with her Sunday school friends. But this custody order has completely cut her off from Calvary and her friends, and from growing her Christian faith. This has been devastatingly heart-wrenching for both Emily and Ava. This has been going on since December 2024," wrote Mat Staver, the Founder and Chairman of the Liberty Counsel.

Bickford is pushing back against the court's order, contending that the ruling violates her parental rights. Liberty Counsel is seeking a reversal of the order and restoration of Bickford's First Amendment right to pass on her religious beliefs to her child.

"It affects not only our family, but the families of all Christian children," Bickford told reporters after oral arguments.

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