

Maine Church Appeals Discriminatory Orders

Calvary Chapel of Bangor on Saturday night filed an appeal to the District Court's denial of the temporary restraining order against Gov. Janet Mills for targeting churches and prohibiting in-person and drive-in-stay-in-your-car worship services. Today, Liberty Counsel, which represents the church, filed a motion in the District Court to issue an injunction pending appeal. If that is denied, the next step will be to file for an emergency injunction at the Court of Appeals. This is the same procedure Liberty Counsel followed in the Kentucky church case, in which that Court of Appeals granted the injunction in a 3-0 ruling for both parking lot and in-person services.

On Saturday afternoon, a federal district judge denied Liberty Counsel's emergency temporary restraining order against the governor's unconstitutional orders. Gov. Mills has allowed so-called "essential" commercial and non-religious entities that include liquor stores, marijuana dispensaries, warehouse clubs, "big box" and "supercenter" stores to accommodate gatherings of people without threat of criminal sanctions.

The Maine State Police, acting under the direction of Governor Mills' orders, have publicly declared that they would enforce the orders and have threatened to impose criminal sanctions on those found in violation of them, including *any* gathering for worship, regardless of whether the church meets or exceeds the state social distancing and hygiene guidelines. The criminal penalty is up to six months in jail and a \$1,000 fine for violating her executive orders.

People may gather in offices, liquor stores, supercenters and a list of other secular venues, but not in churches. People may gather in secular or commercial parking lots, but not in

church parking lots. While people may gather in secular parking lots and listen to the pastor on the radio, they may not park in a church parking lot and listen to the pastor.

Liberty Counsel Founder and Chairman Mat Staver said, "Gov. Janet Mills currently prohibits any religious gathering while allowing many secular gatherings. Gov. Mills has banned even parking lot services where people remain in their vehicles. The state has no authority to dictate the form or manner of worship for every church or house of worship. This discrimination reeks of government control and violates the First Amendment." {eo}

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