

Maine Church Seeks Relief From Unconstitutional COVID-19 Restrictions

Liberty Counsel filed an appeal Friday to the First Circuit Court of Appeals and will soon file an emergency injunction pending disposition of its cert petition at the U.S. Supreme Court on behalf of Calvary Chapel of Bangor against Maine Gov. Janet Mills.

The District Court dismissed the case as moot, which ruling runs contrary to every Supreme Court decision regarding COVID restrictions placed on churches and also is contrary to every other court decision on this issue in the country. Maine has the dubious distinction of imposing the most severe restrictions on churches and places of worship.

The emergency injunction that will be filed at the Court of Appeals is necessary to end the ongoing discrimination against Calvary Chapel. The Supreme Court has already granted relief for churches at least 10 times, two of which involved Liberty Counsel's case of Harvest Rock Church and Harvest International Ministry.

The discrimination is clear because Gov. Mills allows churches to hold secular gatherings to feed, shelter and provide social services and counsel to an unlimited number of people. But religious gatherings have been banned and now are limited to no more than 50 people no matter the size of the building. The governor has allowed many commercial and nonreligious gatherings without restrictions or threat of criminal sanctions.

A California District Court approved Liberty Counsel's settlement on behalf of Harvest Rock Church and Harvest International Ministry against California Gov. Gavin Newsom. This is the first statewide permanent injunction in the

country against COVID restrictions on churches and places of worship. Under the court-ordered statewide permanent injunction, all California churches and places of worship may hold worship without discriminatory restrictions. In that case, California has also been ordered to pay \$1,350,000 in attorneys' fees and costs.

That means Maine now has the most severe restrictions in the nation on places of worship with its 50-person numerical cap notwithstanding the size of the facility.

Ken Graves is the founding and senior pastor of Calvary Chapel of Bangor. The church also has the Calvary Residential Discipleship program, a biblically based ministry that helps men and women who are seeking a way of escape from drugs, alcohol and other life-controlling issues. The yearlong residential program operates two homes with 24 women and 24 men for a total of 48 full-time residents on the church property. CRD is a Christ-centered alternative to secular programs within the drug and alcohol community and includes a work program, daily Bible studies, devotional readings and prayer. Regular attendance at church services is paramount to this program.

The lower courts have not taken seriously the irreparable harm caused by Gov. Mills' unconstitutional COVID restrictions on houses of worship. When Calvary Chapel of Bangor filed its lawsuit in May 2020, the governor's orders permitted no religious gatherings, including parking lot services and violations carried criminal penalties of up to six months in jail and a \$1,000 fine.

Liberty Counsel founder and chairman Mat Staver said, "Calvary Chapel of Bangor and all houses of worship have special protections under the First Amendment and cannot be unequally treated or relegated to second-class status. The Supreme Court has already ruled against these unconstitutional worship bans, but Gov. Janet Mills continues to discriminate against

churches and places of worship. We are asking the Supreme Court to immediately end the most severe restrictions in the country on churches and places of worship.” {eo}

This article originally appeared on .