

Maine Churches Threatened With IRS Complaints for Marriage Support

✖ A group advocating for gay marriage is leading a campaign seeking to revoke the tax-exempt status of churches that supported the repeal of Maine's gay marriage law.

Maine Marriage Equality reports that 80,000 people have joined its online effort to report to the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) churches that advocated for Question One, which revoked the state's same-sex marriage law Nov. 3 with 53 percent of the vote.

Claiming the IRS "clearly forbids churches from participating in political campaigns in any form," Maine Marriage Equality provides complaint forms and contact information for the IRS at its Web site. The group also lists churches and organizations that campaigned for Question One along with major financial contributors.

"It's no secret that the Catholic Diocese led the 'YES on 1' effort in Maine, among many other churches encouraging their congregations to vote 'YES,' handing out signature forms and collection plates during service, and constantly asking for 'sacrificial contributions' from churchgoers," the group claims

Erik Stanley, senior legal counsel for the Alliance Defense Fund (ADF), said the campaign is an "all-too-obvious attempt" to use the IRS to intimidate pastors.

He says the IRS almost always allows churches to support ballot initiatives such as Question 1.

"Pastors and churches have a right to speak about biblical

truths from the pulpit without fear of punishment," Stanley said. "They can encourage their congregations to take a stand for marriage and can directly support legislative issues like Question 1 without running afoul of IRS rules."

ADF is offering free legal assistance to any church the IRS targets.

"Groups that want to redefine marriage are intentionally threatening the tax-exempt status of churches through fear, intimidation and disinformation to silence their voice," Stanley said. "ADF will stand with these churches to defend their right to free speech and religious expression against these baseless scare tactics."