

Pastors Suing Governors in at Least 4 States Over COVID-19 Restrictions on Church Services

Pastors across the United States are not happy about stay-at-home orders banning their in-person services. As a result, pastors from at least four states are suing their governors, claiming the bans infringe on their religious constitutional rights.

Maryville Baptist Church and Pastor Jack Roberts are suing Kentucky Gov. Andy Beshear for “violating their religious freedom by targeting churchgoers Easter Sunday,” according to Liberty Counsel. On Good Friday, Gov. Beshear said that if anyone violates the statewide ban and attends Easter Sunday services, they must self-quarantine for two weeks.

The next day, the court issued a restraining order and urged Louisville Mayor Greg Fischer against “enforcing, attempting to enforce, threatening to enforce, or otherwise requiring compliance with any prohibition on drive-in church services at On Fire [Christian Center].”

On Easter Sunday, Gov. Beshear dispatched state police to Maryville Baptist Church. The officers issued notices of criminal sanctions and mandatory quarantines as well as noted the license plates of attendees so as to follow up with them.

In Tennessee, Metropolitan Tabernacle Church has filed a lawsuit to challenge a local ban on drive-in services. The lawsuit comes after Chattanooga Mayor Andy Berke declared that drive-in services violated the stay-in-shelter order for the city that was instituted April 2.

Three Southern California churches also sued Gov. Gavin Newsom and other officials. The churches argued that the state's social distancing orders violated their First Amendment rights for freedom of religion and assembly.

The three plaintiffs include Church Unlimited in Indio, Shield of Faith Family Church in Fontana and Word of Life Ministries International in Riverside. Church Unlimited was fined \$1,000 for holding its Palm Sunday service despite Riverside County's stay-at-home order.

Kansas Gov. Laura Kelly is also facing a lawsuit. The plaintiffs, two churches and their pastors, say that her order banning religious services of more than 10 people violates their freedom of speech and religion. The lawsuit also claims that Gov. Kelly's order demonstrates "hostility" against churches by allowing secular businesses to stay open.

First Baptist Church in Dodge City and Calvary Baptist Church in Junction City both held indoor services of more than 20 people to celebrate Easter. Both churches required church members to sit at least 6 feet apart and took several other precautions.

"The State does not have a compelling reason for prohibiting church services where congregants can otherwise practice adequate social distancing protocol," the lawsuit said, according to AP.