

University Grants Student Religious Liberty in Housing Request

The American Center for Law and Justice recently helped a student at a public university in Ohio obtain a religious exemption from her university's requirement to live on campus. As a result, she will be able to live off campus in a faith-based household with other students who share her religious values.

Although the university requires two years of residency in University Housing, it offers exemptions or releases from this requirement for numerous secular reasons. The student requested a personal hardship release based upon her sincerely held religious beliefs, stating that the lifestyle on campus was not conducive to living according to biblical principles.

The student's request also explained that she had been accepted into a program that would allow her to live in a faith-based household with other students that hold similar religious principles. Her request was denied, however, because it did not fit within the stated criteria for an exemption or release.

The ACLJ wrote a letter to the university's housing appeal board in support of the student's appeal of this decision that explained that, since the university provides exemptions and releases for numerous secular reasons, and also has an individualized process for reviewing non-religious personal hardship requests, its denial of the student's request violated her **freedom of religion** protected by the **First Amendment**.

The letter also stated that it would directly contradict the university's mission of providing a welcoming environment for

all students to force students to choose to either violate the deeply held convictions of their religious faiths in order to attend the university or forgo attendance there in favor of a university willing to accommodate their faith.

The housing appeal board ruled in the student's favor and granted her request to live in the off-campus faith-based household. The ACLJ is glad it could assist and will continue to defend the rights of students at public university campuses across the country.