

Walgreens Fires Pharmacist for Refusing to Compromise His Beliefs by Selling 'Plan B'

Walgreens wrongfully fired a pharmacist of six years at Walgreens' store in Jamestown, Tenn., in violation of his constitutionally and statutorily protected right to freedom of religion.

That's according to a lawsuit filed Tuesday by the Thomas More Society, a Chicago-based public interest law firm, together with Brentwood, Tenn., attorney Larry Crain, of Crain, Schuette and Associates.

Dr. Hall, a Baptist, entertains profound religious and moral objections to dispensing abortifacients, or abortion-inducing drugs, such as Plan B. For six years, Walgreens respected Hall's religious beliefs and gave him only favorable reviews for his work performance. But in August 2013, Walgreens did an about-face and tried to force Hall to dispense Plan B in violation of his beliefs. When Hall indicated his intent to continue following the internal procedures that accommodated his beliefs, Walgreens fired him.

"Dr. Hall's right to live according to his religious beliefs, including in his workplace, is protected both under the Federal Civil Rights Act and the Tennessee State Constitution," says Crain. "Americans have the right to live according to their sincerely held religious beliefs and not be forced to participate in actions that they deeply and sincerely believe are morally wrong."

From the time of his hiring in March 2007, Hall followed Walgreens' well-known protocol, allowing him to ask another

pharmacist to dispense prescription drugs such as Plan B. After the implementation of new FDA protocols in August 2013, requiring that Plan B be sold over the counter, Hall reiterated to his superiors his religious objections to selling the drug and followed up with a call to the employee relations department at Walgreens' corporate headquarters to express his concerns.

One month later, Hall was questioned by his superiors about how he would treat a request for the drug. As he had been informed of no change in store policy due to the change in FDA regulations, he verbally went through the standard protocol, which he had followed for the past six years. But then he was fired on the spot.

"It is illegal for Walgreens to attempt to force employees like Dr. Hall to dispense certain drugs in violation of their religious and moral beliefs," states Jocelyn Floyd, attorney with the Thomas More Society, "especially after six years of settled store practices showed that Walgreens could reasonably accommodate Dr. Hall's religious beliefs with no difficulties."

As a result of his firing, Hall has suffered the following:

- Denial of unemployment benefits by Walgreens
- Premature loss of health insurance, which caused him to incur thousands of dollars in medical bills that would have otherwise been covered
- Three months of unemployment with the inability to find employment
- Having to spend his retirement money and cashing out all of his stock in order to pay his bills while unemployed
- Obtaining new employment 60 miles away from his home with a significant pay cut

Hall says he has chosen to file the complaint not only to repair and redress the losses that he has suffered but also to

prevent similarly situated pharmacists from being forced to choose between honoring their conscience and keeping their jobs.