

Widow's Prayer Rights Trampled in Senior Living Facility

God is a defender of the widows—and He's using Alliance Defending Freedom (ADF) to take up one widow's cause in the Minneapolis area.

A senior living complex there banned a widow from **praying**, reading her Bible and discussing her faith in private conversations with other residents in the commons area. The complex wrongly claims that it cannot allow the senior or any other resident to engage in private religious expression because it accepts government funds.

"Government funding should not be misused to ban a widow's prayers," said Matt Sharp, ADF legal counsel. "The private decision of senior citizens to discuss their faith, read the Bible and **pray** is private speech, and no law requires this privately owned independent living facility to restrict the religious expression of these members of America's greatest generation."

Here's the back story: When resident Ruth Sweats of Spring Lake Park's Osborne Apartments tried to read the Bible, **pray** and have a private conversation about faith with another resident in the commons area of the property, the property's social worker told her to stop. The social worker said that Osborne Apartments is a HUD building and that Sweats does not have rights protected by the **First Amendment** because HUD does not allow religious discussion to occur in the commons area.

But as the ADF letter explains, "The Establishment Clause is a restriction on government, not on private speakers. Because Osborne Apartments is a private, nonprofit corporation—not a

government controlled entity—it is not bound by the Establishment Clause’s prohibition on the government endorsement of religion. Osborne Apartments is free to allow the residents to engage in religious discussion and prayer.”

The letter also explains that “HUD does not prohibit discussion about religion in the facilities to which it provides funding” and that federal court precedent has established that “simply because the government provides a benefit with public funds does not mean that all ‘mention of religion or prayers’ must be whitewashed from the use of the benefit.”

Additionally, the letter points out that the actions of Osborne Apartments, managed by Ebenezer Corporation of Minneapolis, may violate federal and state anti-discrimination laws.

“The right thing to do out of respect for the senior citizens—many of whom fought or saw their spouses fight in wars to defend our nation and the freedoms upon which it is built—is to remove the ban on religious expression in the commons area,” the letter states. “We hope that this letter will clear up these issues and that you will do away with this terrible policy.”