



Written by [Bob Adelman](#) on October 1, 2020

ADF Sues Virginia AG Over New Law Forcing Ministries To Violate Their Convictions or Pay Huge Fines

Alliance Defending Freedom (ADF), a Christian non-profit law firm, [sued Virginia Attorney General Mark Herring on Tuesday](#) over a new law adding “sexual orientation” and “gender identity” as protected categories in the state’s Human Rights Act. The simple addition of those fluid, subjective, and amorphous terms jeopardizes Christian ministries’ ability to, among other things, hire employees who support those ministries.

This lawsuit was predicted by Victoria Cobb, president of The Family Foundation just days after Virginia Governor Ralph Northam signed it into law: “Despite every conceivable effort on our part, and yours, both the Democrat-controlled legislature and Governor Northam disregarded ... our ... requests to safeguard fundamental religious liberties.... We can be certain of one thing from all of this: lawsuits are coming.”

The Virginia Values Act (S.B. 868), effective July 1, compels churches, religious schools and Christian ministries to hire employees who do not share their beliefs on marriage, sexuality, and gender identity.

But it reaches far more than just hiring non-believers. Wrote Tyler O’Neil at *PJ Media*:

S.B. 868 and [a companion House bill] require the ministries to hire employees who disagree with their beliefs on marriage, sexuality, and gender; mandate that the ministries hire employees whose beliefs and lifestyles are “antagonistic to the ministries’ convictions”; prohibit the ministries from firing employees who oppose their missions; require the ministries to provide services in a manner that violates their beliefs; ban the ministries from even communicating their biblical beliefs; make the ministries use their facilities in a way that contradicts their beliefs; and force the ministries to pay for “gender reassignment” procedures in their health plans, even though the ministries object to these procedures.

These laws put the ministries, [claims the lawsuit] “in an impossible position: they must either abandon the religious convictions they were founded upon, or be ready to face investigations, an onerous administrative process, fines up to \$100,000 for each violation, unlimited compensatory and punitive damages and attorney-fee awards, and court orders forcing them to engage in actions that would violate their consciences.”

They go even further than that. In addition to compelling Christian ministries to include in their



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employee healthcare plans coverage for “sex reassignment” and “gender affirming” surgeries, they also prohibit them from offering sex-specific classes for parenting, Christian discipleship, and sports. Even promoting their beliefs on their websites could bring down the heavy hammer of the state on their heads.

The lawsuit claims that the new laws violate at least five constitutional rights: the right to the free exercise of religion guaranteed under the Virginia Religious Freedom Restoration Act and the state’s constitution; the right to free speech under the state’s constitution; the state’s Establishment Clause; and the state constitution’s Due Process Clause.

As ADF explained:

The government should protect freedom, not take it away, and that’s why ADF filed suit on behalf of Calvary Road Baptist Church, Community Fellowship Church, Community Christian Academy, and Care Net.



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