



PRESS RELEASE
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Augusta School Department Punishes Employee for Telling Coworker, “I will pray for you”

*First Liberty Institute and Eaton Peabody file charge of religious discrimination with EEOC
after Toni Richardson is interrogated about her religious identity by her employer*

Augusta, ME—Toni Richardson, an educational technician employed by the Augusta School Department, filed charges of religious discrimination and retaliation today with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) after being instructed to never use phrases like, “I will pray for you” and “you were in my prayers” in private conversations with coworkers. A copy of the charge is available [here](#).

“What Augusta Public Schools did by punishing Toni for discussing her faith in a private conversation with a coworker is unconscionable,” said Timothy Woodcock of the Maine law firm Eaton Peabody. “The law is clear: employers cannot discriminate against employees who privately discuss their faith while at work.”

Toni tried to privately encourage a coworker—with whom she attends church—by saying, “I will pray for you.” Even though the coworker thanked Toni, the Augusta Schools Department interrogated her, asking whether she had ever identified herself to coworkers as a Christian or privately told a colleague she was praying for him. Later, she received an official “coaching memorandum,” explaining that she could not use “phrases that integrate public and private belief systems” while at school. The memo specifically explains that she will face discipline or dismissal in the future for using phrases like, “I will pray for you” and “you were in my prayers” in private conversations with colleagues at work.

“I was shocked that my employer punished me for privately telling a coworker, ‘I will pray for you,’” Toni Richardson says, “I am afraid that I will lose my job if someone hears me privately discussing my faith with a coworker.”

“No one should be threatened with losing their job for privately telling a coworker, ‘I will pray for you,’” Jeremy Dys, Senior Counsel for First Liberty Institute, says. “School employees are not required to hide their faith from each other while on campus.”

To read the charge of discrimination, go to FirstLiberty.org/Richardson.

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About First Liberty Institute

[First Liberty Institute](#) is the largest legal organization in the nation dedicated exclusively to defending religious freedom for all Americans.

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