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Family Research Council Calls on Georgia Governor to Withdraw Demand for Pastor's Sermons and Documents

Tony Perkins calls on Gov. Nathan Deal to halt violation of church sanctity

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Family Research Council (FRC) today expressed outrage after the State of Georgia issued a legal demand that Dr. Eric Walsh, a lay pastor, hand over his sermons, sermon notes, and all pastoral documentation including his Bible. FRC launched a petition today at FRC.org/Walsh that calls on Governor Deal to “correct this egregious overreach of the state into church affairs.”

“This demand for Dr. Eric Walsh’s sermons, sermons notes, and ministerial documentation is an alarming display of government intrusion into the sanctity of the church, pastor’s study, and pulpit,” said Tony Perkins, Family Research Council President and himself an ordained pastor. “This is something that I would have expected to see in a communist country, not America. The pulpit is to be governed only by the Word of God. Government scrutiny of speech in the pulpit is unconstitutional, and unconscionable. Family Research Council stands with Dr. Walsh, and any other pastor who is targeted by the government because of what is said in the pulpit. We call on Gov. Deal to correct this egregious overreach of the state into church affairs.”

Travis Weber, Director of FRC’s Center for Religious Liberty, joins Dr. Eric Walsh at a press conference later today at the Georgia State Capitol, along with Walsh’s attorneys at First Liberty Institute and an array of pastors and ministry leaders calling for the State of Georgia to cease its hostility toward people of faith.

“We’ve recently seen the former Mayor of Houston issue subpoenas against pastors in Houston, Texas, seeking their sermons,” said Weber. “This action against Dr. Walsh is another unjust assault on people of faith, including the pulpit itself. This cannot go unchallenged. We support Dr. Walsh in his resistance, and call upon the Georgia government to act according to the law and traditions of our country, which respect people of faith and the autonomy of the church. What they are doing is the opposite of religious freedom and everything that it means to be an American,” concluded Weber.

Dr. Eric Walsh was one of the nation’s leading health administrators until being fired in 2014 by the Georgia Department of Public Health. A lay minister in the Seventh-day Adventist Church, Walsh was fired after Georgia officials learned of his faith. Documents released by First Liberty include emails showing that Georgia officials assigned employees to examine his sermons on YouTube—sermons dealing with common Christian themes including creation, compassion, spiritual growth, the family, and Christian living. He was fired after this examination.

Walsh has filed a federal lawsuit against Georgia, alleging unlawful religious discrimination. Now, as part of that lawsuit, the state of Georgia—which ironically claims it did not fire Walsh for religious reasons—is demanding he hand over religious documents: his most intimate, private sermon notes, along with sermons themselves.

Read more about Dr. Walsh’s case at FirstLiberty.org/Walsh

To sign FRC's petition in support of Dr. Eric Walsh: frc.org/walsh