



(Firefighter John Brooks. Photo Credit: First Liberty Institute)

New York Firefighter Reaches Settlement with City of Utica (NY) Allowing Him to Continue to Serve Community, Adhere to Faith
First Liberty client has served as firefighter for more than a decade

UTICA, N.Y.—Today, First Liberty Institute announced it has settled a lawsuit with the City of Utica (NY) in favor of client and New York firefighter John Brooks. The City agreed to grant Brooks a religious accommodation and allow him to continue working as a firefighter while adhering to his religious beliefs.

“The city made the right choice to grant Mr. Brooks a religious accommodation,” said Roger Byron, Senior Counsel for First Liberty. “Mr. Brooks just wants to be treated like every other firefighter and be safe. He is relieved that he will be able to continue to serve his community as a firefighter while also observing his religious beliefs.”

Brooks, a devout Nazirite, made a personal vow to God to refrain from cutting the hair of his scalp based on Biblical instruction in the book of [Numbers](#). The Utica Fire Department (UFD) originally refused to grant Brooks a religious accommodation from its grooming standards and ordered Brooks either to cut his hair or wear a hair net at all times while on duty. The hair net caused a life-threatening safety risk to Brooks when it interfered with his oxygen mask while Brooks was inside a structure fire. UFD routinely allows female firefighters, with identical equipment and job descriptions, to have their hair longer than Brooks’ hair. Last year, Brooks filed an amended federal civil [complaint](#) against the City of Utica (NY) for violating federal and state anti-discrimination laws.

Brooks has served with UFD for twelve years, during which time the city has granted religious accommodations to firefighters of other faiths.

“I’m very grateful to First Liberty for all their help,” said John Brooks. “They are a great law firm. All I ever wanted was for the city to accommodate my religious beliefs and treat me the same as other firefighters with long hair. I’m thrilled that the city was willing to work with me so I can continue to serve my community.”

To learn more, visit FirstLiberty.org/Brooks.

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About First Liberty Institute

[First Liberty Institute](https://FirstLiberty.org) is a non-profit public interest law firm and the largest legal organization in the nation dedicated exclusively to defending religious freedom for all Americans.

To arrange an interview, contact Lacey McNiel at media@firstliberty.org or by calling 972-941-4453.