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**News Release**
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**First Liberty Institute Informs Illinois Governor of Elgin Church’s Immediate Intent to Resume In-Person Church Gatherings**

*Coalition of churches will begin in-person services on May 17 while*

*implementing strict health and safety protocols*

**Elgin, IL**—First Liberty Institute today sent a letter to Illinois Governor J. B Pritzker on behalf of Northwest Bible Baptist Church (“NWBBC”) in Elgin, Illinois informing him that the church will immediately resume in-person Church services on May 17, 2020. After outlining the extensive health and safety measures—measures are at least as stringent as required by retail businesses, the CDC, and local ordinances—the church intends to employ as it resumes meetings, it concludes by asking whether Governor Pritzker intends to enforce [Executive Order 2020-32 (COVID-19 Executive Order No. 30)](https://www2.illinois.gov/Pages/Executive-Orders/ExecutiveOrder2020-32.aspx) against NWBBC.

You can read First Liberty’s letter here.

“Churches across Illinois and the nation have respectfully submitted to governmental restrictions on social gatherings throughout the pandemic,” said Jeremy Dys, Special Counsel for Litigation and Communications for First Liberty institute. “NWBBC is grateful for government officials who have worked to protect citizens but now believes it is time to begin responsibly returning to in-person services immediately.”

“Churches are more than a place of fellowship, it is an identifiable assembly of believers in Jesus Christ,” Dr. Keith Gomez, pastor of Northwest Bible Baptist Church said. “We are grateful for the guidance our government has provided through this pandemic and have respectfully refrained from gathering for weeks. However, we are persuaded that now is the time to safely resume meeting together in-person.”

Illinois has prevented in-person religious services for roughly 5 weeks during the COVID-19 outbreak. In response, churches like NWBBC shifted to virtual or drive-in church services. NWBBC attempted to meet in-person, but has been forced by law enforcement to resume virtual services.  While meeting virtually, sheriff’s deputies came regularly to ensure compliance with the Governor’s shelter-in-place directive.  NWBBC believes they have a religious obligation to meet in-person and questions the authority of the state to direct them to refrain from so meeting.

NWBBC leads a coalition of nearly 50 churches from across the state with plans to hold in-person services while implementing strict health and safety protocols later this month. The churches intend to follow very strict guidelines for safely conducting in-person services, exceeding those recommended by the CDC, including: encouraging those sixty-five and older or in at risk categories to stay home and participate via live stream, requiring the use of personal protection equipment (“PPE”), scanning those entering for a fever with non-touch thermometers by screeners wearing appropriate PPE, separating the seating of non-family units by a minimum of six (6) feet, only seating individuals every other row for front to back spacing throughout the main floor and balcony of the worship space, and more.

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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.