

California Fire Chief to Seek Review of Ninth Circuit Panel Decision

The City of Stockton illegally terminated fire chief's employment because of religion.

San Francisco, CA—Today, First Liberty Institute, Baker Botts, and the Church State Council announced that they will seek review of a [decision](#) by a three-judge panel of the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit, which sided with the City of Stockton in firing former fire chief Ron Hittle. Fire Chief Hittle was wrongfully terminated for attending a leadership conference hosted at a church.

“It is a tragic day for religious liberty in America when someone can be fired merely because they attend an event hosted within a religious institution’s building,” said David Hacker, Vice President of Litigation at First Liberty Institute. “The city broke the law when it fired Chief Hittle due to clear religious bias. We plan on seeking further review of today’s decision to uphold the meaning of Title VII for all Americans in the workplace. We look forward to continuing the fight for Chief Hittle, including ultimately seeking Supreme Court review if necessary.”

The city of Stockton, California fired Chief Hittle after 24 years of service because he attended a leadership conference hosted at a church. Although the city requested Chief Hittle attend a leadership training course of his choice, it later opened an investigation after he attended Willow Creek Church’s Global Leadership Summit, a world-class conference with speakers from a variety of religious and non-religious backgrounds, including Facebook’s COO, Sheryl Sandberg. The city listed Chief Hittle’s attendance at a “religious event” while on duty as the primary reason for his termination. Chief Hittle sued, but in March 2022, a district court sided with the city.

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About First Liberty Institute

[First Liberty Institute](#) 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 John Manning at media@firstliberty.org or by calling 972-941-4454.