

Fire Chief Terminated for Attending Leadership Conference Hosted By Church Appeals Ninth Circuit Decision

Fire Chief Ron Hittle's attorneys submit request for en banc hearing to correct flawed legal standard involving religious discrimination.

San Francisco, CA—First Liberty Institute, Baker Botts LLP, and the Church State Council filed a petition for an *en banc* rehearing by the U.S. Court for Appeals for the Ninth Circuit to review a three-judge panel decision that allowed the Stockton (CA) Fire Department to dismiss a fire chief, Ron Hittle, for attending a leadership conference held at a church.

You can read the petition [here](#).

“Firing Chief Hittle for attending a world-class leadership conference attended by thousands simply because it was associated with religion is clear evidence of illegal religious discrimination,” said Stephanie Taub, Senior Counsel at First Liberty. “We urge the Ninth Circuit to grant rehearing *en banc* to fix the panel’s dangerous ruling.”

The City of Stockton, California terminated Fire Chief Ron Hittle after 24 years of service, because he attended a religious leadership conference while on the clock. Although the City asked Chief Hittle to attend a leadership training course, it opened an investigation after he attended Willow Creek Community Church’s Global Leadership Summit, a world-class conference with speakers from a variety of religious and non-religious backgrounds, including Jack Welch, former CEO of General Electric, and Super Bowl winning coach Tony Dungy. Prior speakers include Sheryl Sandberg of Facebook and former President Bill Clinton. The City listed as the Chief Hittle’s attendance at a “religious event” while on duty as the primary reason for his termination.

The court made two major errors when it ruled against Chief Hittle. It ignored Supreme Court precedent in *Kennedy v. Bremerton School District* when it allowed the “perception of others” to justify its religious discrimination against Chief Hittle. The court also held religious claims to a more difficult legal standard than other kinds of discrimination. Chief Hittle’s legal team is seeking review of this decision, to safeguard the religious freedoms of all Americans in the workplace.

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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.

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