

State of Maine Sued for Censoring Fundraising Letter Officials Claim is 'Anti-Muslim'

BANGOR, ME, Sept. 30 /Christian Newswire/ -- Today the Christian Action Network (CAN) filed a federal lawsuit against the state of Maine for censoring a fundraising letter state officials claimed contained "an inflammatory anti-Muslim message." Maine officials fined and banned CAN from mailing any future letters under the threat of criminal prosecution. Liberty Counsel represents CAN.

CAN was in good standing with a valid license for prior years in Maine, authorizing the group to mail letters in the state. CAN filed to renew its license in March 2009, prior to sending the letter, and the check for the annual license was deposited and cashed by the state. In April, CAN mailed a letter exposing how some public schools were promoting Islam by providing instruction on the Five Pillars of Islam and the Koran. The letter pointed out that some schools have provided a "prayer room" for Muslims and one textbook that told seventh grade students they "will become Muslim." The letter listed Governor John Baldacci as a person who is over the public schools and someone to whom the recipients of the letter should voice their opinion.

CAN was informed in May 2009 that its application was now being denied, and a \$4,000 fine was imposed for three reasons: (1) the state alleged CAN's letter contained "an inflammatory anti-Muslim message;" (2) the letter used Gov. John Baldacci's name without his approval; and (3) the registration was allegedly "incomplete." CAN filed this lawsuit challenging the state statute regarding use of a person's name, which the state has interpreted to mean that the governor's name cannot be used in a direct mail piece without his permission. The suit also raises a free speech challenge to the state, censoring the letter for its alleged "anti-Muslim message."

Mathew D. Staver, Founder of Liberty Counsel and Dean of Liberty University School of Law, commented: "The chief purpose of the First Amendment was to prevent the government from licensing the press. Citizens do not need permission to petition government officials or to protest government policies. The state of Maine has no business licensing one viewpoint on controversial issues and cannot deny speech because some bureaucrat deems it 'anti-Muslim.'"