



Written by [Michael Tennant](#) on March 12, 2019

Church Sues Washington State for Forcing It to Pay for Abortion Coverage

A church is suing the state of Washington over a law forcing the church to pay for abortion coverage as part of the employee health plan it offers.

Cedar Park Church, a family of churches across the Evergreen State that also operates Christian schools, purchased group health insurance for its employees in keeping with its moral and legal obligations. Under SB 6219, a state law passed last year, any group health plan that includes maternity coverage, as Cedar Park's does, must also include abortion coverage. The penalties for noncompliance include fines and imprisonment.



On Friday, the Alliance Defending Freedom (ADF), an Arizona-based nonprofit legal organization, [filed suit](#) on behalf of Cedar Park in the U.S. District Court for the Western District of Washington. The lawsuit challenges both the constitutionality and the legality of SB 6219.

Besides the U.S. Constitution's guarantees of religious freedom and equal protection, Washington itself offers such assurances, notes the [complaint](#). The state constitution reads, "Absolute freedom of conscience in all matters of religious sentiment, belief and worship, shall be guaranteed to every individual, and no one shall be molested or disturbed in person or property on account of religion." In addition, state law mandates that "no individual or organization with a religious or moral tenet opposed to a specific service may be required to purchase coverage for that service or services if they object to doing so for reason of conscience or religion."

Despite this, [observes ADF](#), Washington "has sought to force pharmacists to provide contraceptives and abortion-inducing drugs against their religious beliefs — while allowing pharmacists to refer for all kinds of nonreligious reasons. And Washington florist Barronelle Stutzman continues to fight in court for her right to choose what events to celebrate and messages to express with her artistic talents."

SB 6219 is the state's latest attempt to circumvent clear constitutional and statutory requirements of religious freedom.

"No church should be coerced to pay for abortions, least of all a church that dedicates its ministry to protecting and celebrating life," said ADF Legal Counsel Elissa Graves. "Cedar Park believes and teaches that every human life begins at conception and is worthy of protection at every point until natural death. Further still, Cedar Park demonstrates its pro-life ethic in tangible ways: partnership with a local pregnancy care center, hosting an annual camp for children in foster care, operating a school that serves over 1,000 students, and ministering to hundreds of couples struggling with infertility. The state of Washington has no business strong-arming this church, or any other, into contradicting the deeply held beliefs that motivate its ministry."



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The pro-life cause is quite personal to Cedar Park senior pastor Jay Smith and his wife, Sandy. The two of them dated in high school and planned to get married after graduation. Before that could happen, Sandy became pregnant and briefly considered getting an abortion but ultimately chose life, bearing the first of the couple's four daughters. SB 6219 "felt like a slap in the face" to the Smiths, says ADF.

"Washington state has gone out of its way to bully churches and other religious nonprofits to violate their beliefs by paying for abortions," said ADF Senior Counsel Kevin Theriot, vice president of the ADF Center for Life. "The Supreme Court has consistently held that government hostility toward people of faith is unconstitutional and has no place in our society. The state's policy crushes dissent and violates the Constitution's Free Exercise Clause by targeting Cedar Park's entirely legitimate internal policies and religious beliefs."

Cedar Park is asking the court to issue a permanent injunction prohibiting the state from enforcing SB 6219 against the church. If successful, the lawsuit would have the effect of freeing all religious organizations in Washington from the obligation to pay for abortion coverage in their employee health plans. This is as it should be for, as Thomas Jefferson put it, "to compel a man to furnish contributions of money for the propagation of opinions" — not to mention the execution of practices — "which he disbelieves and abhors, is sinful and tyrannical."



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