

Banner Witcoff Settles Pro Bono Lawsuit with Illinois Department of Corrections Officials in Federal Court; Judge Praises Lawyers' Exemplary and Patient Conduct

Banner Witcoff successfully represented plaintiff Cory ("Harli") Gregory in litigation against defendants, Illinois Department of Corrections (IDOC) officials, in United States District Court in the Northern District of Illinois.

The lawsuit, filed in 2018 under the Religious Land Use and Institutionalized Persons Act of 2000 (RLUIPA) and the Illinois Religious Freedom Restoration Act (RFRA), alleged that the defendants violated Gregory's rights to practice her religion.

Gregory, an IDOC inmate and practitioner of Odinism, a recognized religion by IDOC, required specific items and settings for worship, which include outdoor services with specific objects and materials. She contended that her religious freedoms were infringed upon by Stateville Correctional Center officials who ignored her requests for accommodations necessary for Odinism.

The lawsuit detailed Gregory's multiple ignored requests to the prison chaplain, as well as incidents where her religious correspondence was intercepted and misinterpreted, leading to disciplinary actions, including segregation and restrictions on privileges.

Defendants moved to dismiss several claims, but the court's decision allowed some claims to proceed. On June 10, 2024, nearly 6 years after the case was filed, the parties resolved the dispute.

Judge Jeffrey Cole commended the efforts of both parties' counsel in reaching the settlement. Judge Cole highlighted that the attorneys' advocacy was "dignified, patient, balanced, and cooperative and shows that lawyers can act civilly and courteously in their dealings with each other without sacrificing in the slightest the obligations they owe to their clients or to the court." "[T]he efforts of those who, like Mr. Patel and Mr. Wolfgram, volunteer their services or perform pursuant to an appointment by the court are indispensable to the operations of this Court and Courts throughout the Nation. Without their contributions, courts could not perform their duties nearly as efficiently or well as they do."

Gregory was represented by Banner Witcoff shareholders Binal Patel, Brian Apel, and Christian Wolfgram.