

Advocates for Faith and Freedom News Release
November 6, 2007 – FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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MEMPHIS, Tenn. – Advocates for Faith and Freedom filed a federal lawsuit today against the Memphis Housing Authority. MHA officials unconstitutionally forced elderly and disabled tenants at a government housing facility to stop holding weekly Bible studies and religious gatherings at the facility's recreational room. MHA has also instituted a citywide ban on religious meetings in all residential facilities.

"The Memphis Housing Authority is abusing its position of trust over the disabled and elderly," said Advocates' General Counsel Robert Tyler. "These weekly gatherings should be allowed no differently than other gatherings held by private organizations who meet in such rooms to discuss social issues."

In September 2007, Pearlie Jenkins, founder of Healing Heart Outreach Ministries, Inc.; Rosie Meredith; Sam Tate; and Tom Lowe were told their religious activities could no longer take place in the community recreation room of the MHA facility because the gathering was supposedly a violation of the so-called "separation of church and state."

Many of the residents living in the subsidized housing facilities are physically incapable of leaving the premises or, due to financial difficulties, are unable to attend religious meetings elsewhere in the area. Attorneys with Advocates for Faith and Freedom are asking the court to allow the Bible studies and religious gatherings to continue throughout the course of the lawsuit.

"The private religious speech that is occurring at these gatherings is protected by the First Amendment. The community rooms in the facilities are provided for use by all residents," said Advocates' Legal Counsel Jennifer Monk. "The government's incorrect interpretation of the Establishment Clause is an illegitimate reason for banning religious speech."

The Alliance Defense Fund (www.telladf.org) is co-counsel in the case.

To review a copy of the complaint for this case, please visit www.faith-freedom.com and click on the Media Links tab. The complaint can be found under the case title: "Healing Heart Outreach Ministries, Inc., et al. v. Memphis Housing Authority, et al."

Advocates for Faith and Freedom is a national non-profit legal organization whose aim is to protect religious liberty in the courts. To learn more about our organization, please visit www.faith-freedom.com.

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