

New York staffers sue Salvation Army: Charge religious and sexual intolerance

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Staffers of the Salvation Army in New York state have sued the government-funded organization, alleging that it has preached religious and sexual intolerance to its employees. Current and ex-employees filed suit February 24, accusing the charity of creating a hostile work atmosphere for employees who provide social services for thousands of children in the state, the Associated Press reported.

The lawsuit filed by the American Civil Liberties Union said the Salvation Army required employees to identify their church affiliation, promise to preach the gospel and permit their religious leaders to reveal private information to the Salvation Army. Beside being a charitable organization, the Salvation Army is an evangelical church.

Donna Lieberman, executive director of the New York Civil Liberties Union, said the Salvation Army may have a right to promote its religion but cannot do so with government money. She called the suit “the first major challenge to the coming wave of faith-based initiatives” of the Bush administration. The evangelical organization receives \$89 million in government funding, much of which is used for child care.

Margaret Geissman, one of 18 plaintiffs, said she resigned her human resources management job last year after being harassed by her supervisors for declining to reveal the religions and sexual orientations of staffers. Martin Garbus, a lawyer for the plaintiffs, said the Salvation Army mandated that all employees complete statements revealing their religious histories by the end of February.

In a statement reacting to the suit, the Eastern Territory of the Salvation Army said it is reviewing the complaint, adding that “our policies and procedures are entirely consistent with all applicable local, state and federal laws—all of which have been in

effect for many years—applying to employment practices of religious organizations.”

-Religion News Service