

Suits filed on behalf of fired pharmacists: Druggists refused to dispense "morning-after" pill

by [Religion News Service staff](#) in the [February 21, 2006](#) issue

A conservative advocacy group has filed a series of lawsuits against Walgreens after the drugstore chain fired four pharmacists for refusing to dispense the "morning-after" pill to patients.

The lawsuits, filed in Illinois January 27 by the Washington-based American Center for Law and Justice, represent the latest skirmish in an escalating legal battle. The issue has surfaced in several states, pitting pharmacists who say filling such prescriptions violates their religious beliefs against drug manufacturers and patients demanding medicine they are legally entitled to.

The ACLJ, founded by religious broadcaster Pat Robertson, argued that Walgreens violated the Illinois Health Care Right of Conscience Act. "In punishing these pharmacists for asserting a right protected by the Conscience Act, Walgreens broke the law," senior counsel Francis J. Manion said in the statement.

Walgreens argues that it must comply with a new state regulation that requires all pharmacists in Illinois to dispense birth control drugs to patients.

After the regulation went into effect, Walgreens asked pharmacists to pledge in writing that they would fill prescriptions for contraceptives like the morning-after pill. When the plaintiffs refused to sign in November, they were suspended indefinitely without pay.

Walgreens spokesman Michael Polzin said that the company needed to comply with the new regulation. "We are required to follow the law. We don't have a choice in the matter," he said.

The most recent lawsuits sue Walgreens and the Illinois governor's office. In a previous suit filed in federal court, the ACLJ is representing the same pharmacists. -

