



Department of Justice

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Justice Department Settles Muslim Corrections Officer Religious Liberty Case

WASHINGTON – The Justice Department announced today that a federal court in Manhattan approved a consent decree between the Justice Department and the New York State Department of Correctional Services (DOCS). The consent decree settles the Justice Department’s lawsuit alleging that DOCS failed to accommodate the religious practices of correctional officers as required by federal law.

The suit, filed on March 15, 2007, arose out of a case in which a Muslim correctional worker at a halfway house had for years been permitted to wear a prayer cap, or kuffi, but in 2005 was told he must remove the skull cap while at work. The suit alleged that there was no policy in place for DOCS to review requests for reasonable accommodation of religious practices as required by Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Under the settlement approved today, DOCS must keep in place a process under which employees seeking religious accommodations to workplace policies, whether uniform issues, Sabbath and religious holiday observances, or other issues, are given an individualized review and determination. Denial of a requested reasonable accommodation may only be made after a detailed consideration of the impact of the accommodation on performance of job duties. The Muslim corrections officer whose case prompted the suit has been permitted to wear a dark blue or black kuffi with his uniform while working at the halfway house since shortly after the Justice Department notified DOCS that it would file suit.

“Today’s settlement underscores the Justice Department’s commitment to protecting the religious liberties guaranteed by federal law for all Americans,” said Acting Assistant Attorney General for the Civil Rights Division Grace Chung Becker.

“Federal law prohibits workplace discrimination on the basis of religion, and requires reasonable accommodation of employees’ religious practices,” said U.S. Attorney for the Southern District of New York Michael J. Garcia. “We are pleased that DOCS has agreed to give fair consideration to its uniformed officers’ requests for such accommodations.”

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