

The *Fire Chaplain* Case

Case Name: *Fox v. City of Austin*

Case Action: Filed complaint in the western district court of Texas on Thursday, August 18

Significance: Whether city officials can dismiss someone from a position because they disagree with his views



Background: Eight years ago, Dr. Andrew Fox created the Fire Chaplaincy Program at the Austin Fire Department. He led a group of volunteer chaplains to serve firefighters, their families, and fire victims. Dr. Fox welcomed and worked with all people, having a spotless record without a single complaint against him. On his own personal blog, Dr. Fox shared that men competing in women's sports is unfair due to their biological differences. A complaint within the fire department was brought to leadership about Dr. Fox's blog post. They tried to force him to recant and apologize for his beliefs. After refusing to walk back on his deeply held religious convictions, the department fired him from his volunteer chaplain position. The city punished Dr. Fox for holding a view contrary to its own. Americans should be able to speak freely without fearing the government's retaliation. Alliance Defending Freedom is representing Dr. Fox in a federal lawsuit against the City of Austin to protect his constitutional rights.

Key Points

- Dr. Fox led the chaplain program for eight years to provide comfort, counsel, and prayer to firefighters, their families, and fire victims—even on the scene. He treats everyone with dignity and respect.
- The City of Austin attacked Dr. Fox's freedom of speech and wanted him to contradict his core beliefs.
- The government cannot coerce and silence someone because they hold a view different from the government's. Dr. Fox's spotless career meant very little when it faced the city's own ideological agenda.
- This is fundamentally problematic for any American who desires to express their religious beliefs in the public sphere.

Key Facts

- Dr. Fox wrote his opinions on men competing in women's sports on his personal blog.
- The Austin Fire Department dismissed Dr. Fox as lead fire chaplain after he refused to apologize for and recant his deeply held religious beliefs.
- This isn't the first-time government officials used their power to cancel those they disagree with: In Atlanta, Georgia, Fire Chief Kelvin Cochran was fired after writing about his Christian views on sexuality in a book he wrote on his personal time. An investigation that included interviews with employees found Cochran treated everyone with dignity and respect, but the mayor fired him anyway—citing, ironically, the need to tolerate diverse views.

The Bottom Line: Every American should be able to speak freely on what they believe without being silenced or punished by the government.