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Terminated Firefighter Takes Religious Discrimination Case to Federal Appeals Court

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Orlando, FLORIDA- Former Orange County Battalion Chief Stephen Davis appealed to the Eleventh Circuit Court of Appeals, filing his initial brief, challenging a lower court's dismissal of his case. The Orange County Fire Rescue fired Davis during the fall of 2021 for opposing the County's aggressive efforts to force the COVID-19 vaccine on firefighters, including those who expressed religious objections to the vaccine. He was the only supervisor to be terminated. Shortly after his termination, Governor DeSantis signed a law banning the very policy that Chief Davis opposed.

Chief Davis, a military veteran, had bravely and faithfully served as a firefighter and paramedic at OCFR for nearly 15 years when the County fired him. He holds a Master's Degree in Emergency Disaster Management, a Bachelor's degree in Fire Emergency Services, and an Associate's degree in EMS. Davis was on the frontlines when the covid pandemic began, sacrificially serving the citizens of Orange County at great personal risk. He was on the fast track for promotion when Orange County Mayor Jerry Demings announced the County's covid vaccine mandate. Davis tried to appeal his termination within the County's employee grievance system to no avail, and his union failed to back him after he filed his individual lawsuit.

Not only did the State of Florida under Governor DeSantis agree with Davis and his fellow plaintiffs in the fall of 2021 that Orange County's vaccine mandate was unlawful, but the state entered an amicus brief on their behalf before the state court. Recognizing the mounting public pressure from that suit and other public resistance efforts to covid vaccine mandates, the Florida legislature by special session the next month in November passed laws banning covid vaccine mandates, just weeks after Davis was terminated.

After all other efforts to get his job back failed, Davis sued the County in the spring of 2022. Orange County then took the case to federal court. In July 2023, the federal court judge dismissed the case without leave to amend his claims or return to court, saying that Davis was clearly "unreasonable" to object to Orange County's conduct, including ordering him to discipline his subordinates, and "unreasonable" to believe the county's Covid-19 vaccine mandate and enforcement were unlawful.

This fall, Davis filed his appeal with the Eleventh Circuit Court of Appeals, challenging the lower court's dismissal of his case. Davis has filed his brief with the help of legal team Scott Street of JW Howard Attorneys and Rachel Rodriguez of Vires Law Group, seeking overturn of the district court's decision and remand to continue pursuing his claims against the county.

Your prayers and support for Chief Davis are crucial. Even three years after covid, **religious liberty and medical freedom still hang in the balance!**

Chief Davis and his legal team would like to thank Truth for Health Foundation and counsel Andy Schlafly for their support for Davis' case in the fight **against tyranny and for liberty.**

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