

Statement on Capitol Hill Baptist Church's Lawsuit

September 22, 2020

Today, through its lawyers at WilmerHale, LLP and First Liberty Institute, Capitol Hill Baptist Church ("CHBC") filed a lawsuit seeking to be able to hold outdoor church services inside Washington, D.C. The following statement may be attributed to Justin Sok, a pastor of CHBC:

Since its founding in 1878, CHBC has met in-person every Sunday except for three weeks during the Spanish Flu in 1918. That changed following Mayor Bowser's first orders concerning COVID-19 on March 11, 2020. Since that time, the members of CHBC—most of whom live in the District—have been unable to meet in person, as one congregation inside District limits (even outdoors).

We are thankful for our mayor and her dedicated efforts to support various interests in D.C. balancing First Amendment freedoms with public health concerns. Meeting in-person as one congregation is a deeply-held religious conviction for which there is no substitute. Our simple desire is to have a community and one that meets together safely.

CHBC has applied for multiple waivers to the policy, but District officials refuse to provide CHBC with a waiver beyond 100 persons as part of a mass gathering. The lawsuit filed Tuesday simply asks that CHBC be permitted to meet in-person, with similar restrictions as area businesses and other gatherings have employed to protect public health.

A church is not a building that can be opened and closed. A church is not an event to be watched. A church is a community that gathers regularly and that community should be treated fairly by the District government.

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