

League joins Christmas Day Firings Case

On December 25, 1992, clerks Kathleen Pielech and Patricia Reed refused to show up for their jobs at a Massachusetts racetrack and were fired. The women filed suit against Massasoit Greyhound, the owners of Raynham-Paunton Greyhound Park, where they had been employed. The Judge in the lower court ruled in June, 1994, that the Catholic religion did not require the plaintiffs to abstain from work on Christmas Day. The plaintiffs appealed their loss in the lower court to the Supreme Judicial Court of Massachusetts, which accepted the case in December. A ruling is expected this spring.

The League released the following statement concerning the case:

“At the invitation of Kathleen Pielech, the Catholic League welcomes the opportunity to file an amicus brief on her behalf, and in support of Patricia Reed, as well. At stake is whether Americans can practice their religion with-out penalty from the state. So elementary is this right that organizations like the ACLU and the ADL have joined with the League in backing the plaintiffs. Freedom of religion means nothing if those who worship are penalized for practicing the tenets of their faith.

“It was decided in 1963 by the Supreme Court, in *Sherbert v. Verner*, that the government may not refuse unemployment compensation to a person unwilling to work on Saturday, the Sabbath of her faith. Thirty years later, in the 1993 Religious Freedom Restoration Act, it was decided that the state must demonstrate a compelling government interest before it can substantially burden the exercise of religious beliefs. Given this legacy, it behooves the Supreme Judicial Court to recognize that Catholics should be allowed the right

to abstain from work on what is surely one of the most pivotal days of the year for Christians of any denomination. The ritual observance of holy days by attending services and seeking time away from work for quiet and prayerful reflection has been a respected mode of honoring the deity. We hope that the Supreme Judicial Court will sustain that tradition by overturning the ruling of the Superior Court.”

Clearly, the fact that the League has joined the ACLU and the ADL in filing a brief in support of Pielech is an indication of the threat to a fundamental First Amendment right to religious liberty and the broad implications the ruling will have for all religions.