

LEAGUE SUBMITS AMICUS IN FREEDOM OF RELIGION CASE

The Catholic League for Religious and Civil Rights has submitted an amicus curiae brief on behalf of Kathleen Pielech and Patricia Reed. The case, Pielech and Reed v. Massasoit Greyhound, Inc., involves the case of two Catholic women who refused to work on Christmas Day, 1992, at a Massachusetts race track. The two clerks were fired from their job at Raynham-Paunton Greyhound Park when they failed to show for work on December 25, 1992. The plaintiffs have appealed their loss in the Bristol Superior Court to the Supreme Judicial Court of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. 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 Supreme Judicial Court, which accepted the case in December, is expected to grant a ruling this spring.

Catholic League president William A. Donohue had this to say about 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 without 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."

The Catholic League is the nation's largest Catholic civil rights organization. It defends the right of Catholics-lay and clergy alike-to participate in American life without defamation or discrimination.