

The Never-Ending Attack on the Little Sisters - and What It Says About Josh Shapiro's Legacy

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A federal district court in Pennsylvania has once again ruled against the Little Sisters of the Poor, striking down a Trump-era religious conscience rule and siding with Pennsylvania and New Jersey. This is in a relentless effort to force Catholic nuns to provide contraceptives and abortion-inducing drugs in their healthcare plans.

For more than 14 years, the Little Sisters - compassionate Catholic nuns who have dedicated their lives to caring for the elderly poor - have been dragged through court by politicians who cannot tolerate their refusal to violate their faith. Twice, the Supreme Court has ruled in the Sisters' favor, yet the harassment continues. And shamefully, at the center of this crusade is Pennsylvania's own governor, Josh Shapiro.

Let's take a drive down the sad memory lane on this story. In 2017, when the Trump administration created a clear exemption for religious non-profits, then-Attorney General Josh Shapiro led the charge to strip it away. He took the Little Sisters back to court, despite their Supreme Court victory in 2016, attempting to force them into complicity with abortion coverage. The case was never about "medicine for women," as Shapiro claimed. It was about coercing nuns into abandoning their sincerely held religious beliefs.

At its core, this fight is about abortion. Today's so-called "pro-choice" politicians are not content with advocating for access to abortion; they want to compel everyone, including people of faith, to participate in it, even against their most deeply-held convictions. For them, tolerance means submission, and conscience protections stand in the way of their agenda.

This is truly alarming and threatens our constitutional rights. The process is the punishment. If a group of elderly nuns can be forced into endless litigation simply for living out their faith, then no one's religious liberty is secure. As the Becket Fund rightly put it, "The district court blessed an out-of-control effort by Pennsylvania and New Jersey to attack the Little Sisters and religious liberty". That's what Shapiro incited.

As if there was any doubt, Gov. Shapiro's legacy is not one of tolerance or pluralism, but of weaponized government against conscience. At a time when the Little Sisters were mourning the deaths of elderly residents during COVID-19, Shapiro still pressed forward with lawsuits to strip their protections.

This hostility is not theoretical. It is personal, targeted, and relentless. As the National Review observed, "the Catholic order of nuns - whose sole purpose is to provide care to destitute elderly people - has been dragged through America's courts by a series of monomaniacal ideologues" for 12 years.

Becket stated the obvious in saying that it is "absurd to think the Little Sisters might need yet another trip to the Supreme Court" after more than a dozen years of litigation. Yet thanks to Shapiro's leadership, that is exactly where they are headed again.

This should give voters pause as Shapiro's national ambitions grow. If this is how he governs in Pennsylvania - punishing nuns for their faith - what would a Shapiro White House look like? Americans who value rights of conscience should expect more of the same: a federal government that crushes dissent, forces conscience into compliance, and never relents until people of faith submit.

We have seen this playbook before. The Independence Law Center helped defend the Hahn family and their business, Conestoga Wood Specialties, all the way to the Supreme Court in 2014 to protect their right not to pay for drugs that can cause abortions. We must not allow history to repeat itself with the Little Sisters of the Poor.

Religious liberty is not a privilege doled out by politicians; it is a fundamental right guaranteed by the First Amendment. Yet Shapiro has shown he believes that right must yield to the left's political agenda.

The Little Sisters' case is a warning: if politicians like Josh Shapiro are given greater power, Americans of faith - whether Christian, Jewish, Muslim, or otherwise - will find themselves in court defending their right to live consistent with their beliefs.

The Little Sisters of the Poor ask for nothing more than the freedom to care for the elderly poor without violating their conscience. For fourteen years, they have stood firm. Their courage should inspire us to do the same.

Pennsylvania voters know Josh Shapiro's record. The rest of the country should take note. Because if this governor ascends to higher office, his legacy of active hostility to religious freedom will not stop at the state line.