

An Atheist Wins Millions in a Settlement over His Religious Rights Violation

Boris Djuric October 16, 2014



Nearly \$2 million in a settlement from the State of California and a nonprofit drug rehab organization, was awarded to an atheist in Northern California for violating his religious liberty.

([Newswire.net](#) -- October 16, 2014) -- A 1.95 million settlement from the State of California and a nonprofit drug rehab organization, was awarded to an atheist in Northern California

for violating his religious liberty.

The State of California sent an atheist to jail for refusing to submit to a “higher power” as part of a treatment program at the Empire Recovery Center in Redding, Calif, local news outlets reported.

After serving a year behind bars for methamphetamine possession, 46-year-old Barry Hazle Jr. of Shasta County was ordered to participate in a residential drug treatment program.

Upon his arrival, Hazle was told that the center’s 12-step program, which was modeled on Alcoholics Anonymous, involved submitting to a “higher power” through prayer, the San Francisco Chronicle reported on Tuesday.

“They told me, anything can be your higher power. Fake it till you make it,” Hazle told the newspaper.

When Hazle refused to pray along, he was sent to jail at the California Rehabilitation Center in Norco for more than 100 days, saying that Hazle was sort of passive-aggressive,” the Searchlight said.

However, in 2007, Hazle sued the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR) and WestCare California, according to the Sacramento Bee.

Six weeks later the CDCR, citing federal case law, issued a directive that parole agents must offer a nonreligious alternative if they object, the Bee reported.

A US district court judge ruled in 2010 that that Hazle’s constitutional right for religious freedom in deed had been violated, but the jury declined to award damages, the Chronicle said.

However, The 9th Circuit Court of Appeals ruled in 2013 that Hazle was entitled to compensation and ordered a retrial in which Hazle gets a \$1.95 million settlement from the State and WestCare California, the newspaper said.

“I’m thrilled to finally have this case settled,” Hazle told the Record Searchlight. “It sends a clear message to people in a position of authority, like my parole agent, for example, that they may not mandate religious programming for their parolees, and for anyone else, for that matter.”

Source: <http://newswire.net/newsroom/news/00085591-an-atheist-wins-1-95-million-in-a-settlement-over-his-religious-rights-violation.html>