

Judge: Billy Graham Evangelistic Association didn't discriminate against black employee

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A North Carolina judge has ruled the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association did not discriminate against a former black employee.

Kimberly McCallum worked for the Charlotte, N.C.-based BGEA from 2003 to 2007 and filed suit in 2009.

While working on a project to recruit campers for a BGEA program, McCallum said she found that only three of 635 churches identified for invitations were primarily black churches. About a week after expressing a concern about discrimination, McCallum was told her administrative assistant position would be eliminated due to "downsizing."

U.S. District Judge Richard L. Voorhees said McCallum failed to prove that the association was not racially neutral when it eliminated her position. The association had argued that there was not enough work in her department for two administrative assistants.

"In short," Voorhees ruled Friday (Oct. 5), "(McCallum's) claims of racial discrimination are not borne out by the evidence."

The judge said McCallum's case centered on racial rather than religious discrimination, and the former employee "does not contend that BGEA employed discriminatory practices in its ministry." He noted that she cited evangelist Billy Graham's theology and clarified that she "would never assert that (BGEA) was discriminating against African American churches."

Voorhees also found that McCallum lacked evidence to prove she was discriminated against when she was unsuccessful in gaining another position at BGEA.

"We are pleased with the court's decision and hopeful that it will allow all parties involved to focus elsewhere," said Brent Rinehart, a BGEA spokesman.

In 2011, the court determined that a "ministerial exception" sought by BGEA did not apply because McCallum's duties did not relate to church governance and were not "important to the spiritual and pastoral mission of the church."