



STATEMENT DW187

Witches Asserting Their Rights in Three Cases

Witches (or practitioners of “Wicca”) are increasingly “coming out of the (broom) closet” to demand recognition and their First Amendment rights of freedom of religion. And they have generally been successful.

In August a Rhode Island tax administrator ruled that witchcraft is a legitimate religion that is entitled to the same nonprofit tax breaks as established churches and religions in that state. The new ruling was issued after an American Civil Liberties Union lawyer intervened on behalf of a Wiccan coven whose tax exemption request was denied in the fall of 1988.

Earlier this year, the right to practice witchcraft in the U.S. military was sought by Air Force Airman Patricia Hutchin, 21. According to the Associated Press, Hutchin demanded the right to celebrate her religion’s holidays, including Halloween. Citing Air Force regulations guaranteeing freedom of religion, her superiors at Lackland Air Force Base in San Antonio, Texas, quickly granted her petition.

In a third case a witch in Mississippi sued the Salvation Army for firing her solely because of her Wiccan faith. Jamie K. Dodge, 28, was employed at the Army’s domestic violence shelter in Pascagoula, which had been receiving federal, state, and local funds. But on August 27, 1987, an Army supervisor saw Dodge working at the copy machine and noticed she was making a copy of a document. Retrieving a paper from a nearby wastebasket the supervisor found “what appeared to be a description of a Satanic or occult ritual,” according to the June 1989 issue of *Church & State* magazine.

Salvation Army officials questioned her about the paper and she admitted she practiced Wicca as her religion. She was promptly fired. The officials said that when they hired Dodge they thought she was a Catholic. “We recognize other denominations as Christian. But we don’t recognize Wicca as a religion; it’s contrary to everything we believe in,” Major Floyd Langley was quoted as saying. Dodge countered that she could still be a Catholic or Methodist and “be a Wiccan....We believe in one God - force and there are different ways to worship.”

In early 1988 she sued the Salvation Army for \$1.25 million, citing Title VII of the federal law that prohibits discrimination on the basis of religion. And earlier this year, a federal judge in Biloxi, Mississippi, agreed, arguing that because the Army received public funds they could not discriminate on the basis of religion. Later this year, Dodge accepted a cash settlement from the Army, reported at \$30,000.