



Commissioner Brad Avakian
Bureau of Labor & Industries

Press Release

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Bend dentist ordered to pay \$347,654 for religious discrimination

Dental hygienist chased from his employ for declining to attend religious-based training

BEND- Oregon Labor and Industries Commissioner Brad Avakian has ordered Dr. Andrew W. Engel and his Bend dental practice to pay nearly \$350,000 in total damages to a former employee who fled Engel's employment when ordered to attend a three-day, Scientology-affiliated symposium or be fired. Besides lost wages and health benefits, the damages include moving expenses after the complainant had to move out of state to find work, as well as emotional distress damages associated with the workplace harassment and complainant's separation from her teenage daughter as she pursued alternate employment.

"Oregon workers deserve to feel safe on the job, secure from an employer's pressure to do something that conflicts with their religious beliefs," said Avakian. "When an employee asks for an accommodation of their religious beliefs, there needs to be a real discussion about accommodation—not a 'my way or the highway' dismissal by the employer."

In investigating and prosecuting this case, Oregon's Bureau of Labor and Industries (BOLI) found that Engel badgered the dental hygienist, now working in East Texas, for several days to convince her to attend the required training with her co-workers, repeatedly brushing aside concerns that Scientology conflicted with her Christian religious beliefs and ignoring a specific accommodation request for an alternative, non-religious training opportunity.

"Oregonians expect, and deserve, an agency that will support local employers who want to do right by their workers," Avakian said. "Right along with that, Oregonians rightly expect that an employer who is hounding a worker to attend a religion-based training conference, to the point that she quits a good job to get away from that environment, is going to be held accountable for their actions."

Visit www.oregon.gov/BOLI for more information about all of BOLI's work to protect workers' rights and support local employers in Oregon.

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The mission of the Bureau of Labor and Industries is to protect employment rights, advance employment opportunities, and protect access to housing and public accommodations free from discrimination.