



April 22, 2016

Hon. Bill English  
Lee County Probate Judge  
P.O. Box 811  
Opelika, AL 36803-0811

John Richardson, Director of Public Safety  
Alabama Law Enforcement Agency  
P.O. Box 1471  
Montgomery, AL 36102-1471

Re: driver license policy regarding head coverings for religious reasons

Dear Judge English and Director Richardson:

We represent Ms. Yvonne Allen, a devout Christian woman, who because of her faith covers her hair. She does so based upon her belief in the Bible and, in particular, 1 Corinthians 11:5-6. We note that the Alabama Department of Public Safety instituted a policy in February 2004 that accommodates an applicant's religious beliefs in wearing head coverings, and we commend the Department for having done so.

However, when Ms. Allen went to renew her license in December 2015 in Lee County, she was required to remove her covering (which only covered her hair and would permit a "full-face" photograph) despite her stating that her religious beliefs compelled her to cover her hair. She was told by both the initial clerk and by Chief Clerk Becky Frayer that the policy applied to Muslims but not to Christians and that she would have to remove her head covering in order to renew her driver's license. To add insult, both of them further told Ms. Allen that they too were Christians and they did not cover their heads, calling into question Ms. Allen's sincerely held religious beliefs.

Clearly, an interpretation of the Department's head covering policy that would permit the adherent of one religion to wear a head covering while denying the adherent of another religion the right to wear a head covering violates the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution.

We thus demand that Judge English's office work with us to schedule an appointment for Ms. Allen to return for a new photograph wearing her head covering and that a new license be issued to her without charge. We further request the Department to issue a clarification to all licensing agencies across the State that the religious accommodation applies to all religions.

Please let us know within ten (10) days whether the Lee County Probate office will willingly accommodate Ms. Allen's religious beliefs and whether the Department will issue something to clarify this matter.

Sincerely,



Randall C. Marshall  
Legal Director  
ACLU of Alabama

Daniel Mach  
Director

Heather L. Weaver  
Senior Staff Attorney

ACLU Program on Freedom of Religion  
and Belief