

Court to hear case over federal backing of faith-based group funding

WASHINGTON (CNS) — The Supreme Court Dec. 1 agreed to review a case challenging the Bush administration's support for federal funding for faith-based institutions.

A group called the Freedom from Religion Foundation filed suit against assorted federal agencies saying they violated the constitutional prohibition on state-supported religions by singling out faith-based organizations as "particularly worthy of federal funding because of their religious orientation." The organization also argued that "the belief in God is extolled as distinguishing the claimed effectiveness of faith-based social services."

The government said the lawsuit should be dismissed because the foundation had no legal standing from which to challenge the way the government operates. But the 7th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals said the organization's members could sue, as taxpayers with an interest in programs funded by Congress.

The Freedom from Religion Foundation describes itself as "an educational group working for the separation of church and state." In its Web site section "what does the foundation do," the first item on the list is "files lawsuits."

In a petition asking the court to take the case, Solicitor General Paul Clement said the Appeals Court decision transforms the standing of taxpayers to challenge the government from its purpose of preventing "the specific historic evil of direct legislative subsidization of religious entities." He said the organization is asking for "a roving license for any 'individual citizen to challenge any action of the executive with which he disagrees.'"

The case will be added to the court's calendar for consideration no sooner than February.