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# Freedom of Religion and Law Enforcement Employment: Recent Court Decisions

**NCJ Number:** 155706

**Journal:**

*FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin* Volume: 64 Issue: 6 Dated: (June 1995) Pages: 28-32

**Author(s):** D L Schofield

**Date Published:** 1995

**Length:** 5 pages

**Annotation**

Demands of law enforcement sometimes conflict with freedom of religion, and this article discusses Federal constitutional and statutory freedom of religion protection in the context of law enforcement employment.

**Abstract**

Recent court decisions have examined the extent to which law enforcement organizations can investigate whether on-duty religious activity adversely affects job performance, place limitations on workplace proselytizing, enforce work assignments that conflict with an employee's religious beliefs, and require employees to work on their Sabbaths. Religious freedom is embodied in the first amendment, Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, and the Religious Freedom Restoration Act of 1993. Court decisions indicate that complaints of workplace misconduct related to a police officer's religious beliefs can be reasonably investigated to determine if legitimate law enforcement interests are adversely affected. Also, law enforcement organizations can limit workplace proselytizing that disrupts police

functions or undermines mandated neutrality. Law enforcement agencies are not obligated to accommodate employee religious beliefs by permitting them to refuse a lawful assignment, but employees must make a good faith attempt to meet their religious needs through reasonable accommodations. Because citizens require law enforcement 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, supervisors may have to schedule employees to work on their Sabbaths. Conflicts that arise in the workplace between legitimate law enforcement interests and employee religious beliefs should be resolved carefully in accordance with appropriate legal principles. Police departments should consult a competent legal advisor before making any policy decisions that limit workplace religious activities of law enforcement employees. 26 endnotes

## Additional Details

### Sale Source:

National Institute of Justice/ Box 6000, Dept F, Rockville, MD 20849,  
United States

NCJRS Photocopy Services Box 6000, Rockville, MD 20849-6000,  
United States

### Publication Format:

Article

### Publication Type:

Legislation/Policy Analysis

### Language:

English

### Country:

United States of America

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