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Muslim Inmate Claims Arkansas Punished Him Over Religious Lawsuit

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A Muslim inmate who won a U.S. Supreme Court ruling protecting religious grooming practices is now suing Arkansas officials, alleging they punished him by transferring him to a federal prison in West Virginia.

Gregory Holt (also known as Abdul Maalik Muhammad) filed a new federal lawsuit through the ACLU of Arkansas, alleging retaliatory transfer to a West Virginia federal facility. The complaint alleges that the Arkansas Department of Corrections retaliated against him by transferring him to a federal prison in West Virginia. Holt contends the move was a direct

response to his ongoing legal battles, which have targeted state prison policies he believes violate constitutional rights.

In 2015, the U.S. Supreme Court unanimously ruled in *Holt v. Hobbs* that Arkansas prison officials could not ban Holt from growing a half–inch beard by his sincere religious belief under RLUIPA. That decision was based on the Religious Land Use and Institutionalized Persons Act, a federal law designed to safeguard inmates’ religious freedoms. Since then, Holt has remained an outspoken advocate, filing multiple lawsuits against prison officials.

According to the complaint, Holt has six active lawsuits challenging Arkansas prison policies and alleges the transfer sought to undermine his legal advocacy. His latest filing claims the abrupt transfer was an attempt to undermine his legal work and discourage future challenges. Since being transferred, Holt alleges he has been denied access to religious services, hygiene supplies, attorney communications, and ongoing case materials.

A spokesperson for the Arkansas Department of Corrections declined to comment. Jeff LeMaster, representing Attorney General Tim Griffin, stated the state will “vigorously defend” its actions. Holt’s legal team argues that Arkansas retains the authority to return him to a state facility and should do so immediately to restore his rights and access to legal materials.

This litigation has drawn support from civil liberties advocates, though some critics question whether repeated legal challenges disrupt institutional safety and order. The dispute highlights ongoing tensions between religious accommodations and prison security policies, an issue that remains contentious in many states.

Holt, who is serving a life sentence for a violent assault, first drew national attention when he sent the Supreme Court a handwritten plea challenging Arkansas’s beard restrictions. His case received support from the administration of then–President Barack Obama, along with diverse religious and secular groups. Despite this past victory, his latest lawsuit underscores how complex and often adversarial the relationship between inmates and state prison authorities can be.

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