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Culture

Firefighters to Sue City over 'Gay Pride' Parade

By Nathan Burchfiel
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(CNSNews.com) - A religious legal organization on Monday announced plans to sue the City of San Diego after firefighters there were allegedly forced to participate in the city's "Gay Pride" parade and subjected to "vile sexual taunts."

According to the Thomas More Law Center, four firefighters were forced to participate in the parade against their will and were "subjected to vile sexual taunts from homosexuals lining the parade route." The center has filed a request to sue the city - an administrative procedure - and expects to file a sexual harassment lawsuit in coming weeks.

"These firefighters dedicated their lives to save the lives of others," Richard Thompson, president and chief counsel of the law center, said in a [statement](#). "They did not sign on to become unwilling props to a controversial political and social agenda."

According to the complaint filed with the city, the firemen of Engine 5 told their chief they did not want to appear in the parade but were told the morning of the parade that they were under orders to participate.

San Diego Fire Chief Tracy Jarman is an open lesbian who lives with her domestic partner. Jarman says the "gay pride" parade "is a fun event and all employees are encouraged to participate."

The firefighters, described by the law center as "devoted husbands and fathers," claim to have been subjected to sexually suggestive comments from parade observers, including "show me your hose," "you can put out my fire," and "give me mouth-to-mouth."

"The experience left me feeling humiliated, embarrassed, and offended by this event," Capt. John Ghiotto said in his statement. "These unsolicited and unwanted behaviors from a few individuals of the public toward us, reduced our morale as well as the integrity of the workplace, and destroyed our professionalism."

In addition to sexual harassment from parade watchers, the firemen say they were subjected to criticism from religious demonstrators protesting the parade. "Not only was I being subjected to these comments [from

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homosexuals] but I had to be told by protestors that homosexuality is sin, I'm going to hell, and I will be judged by God," Engineer Jason Hewitt said.

"Participation [in the parade] should be a voluntary act," Brian Rooney, a spokesman for the law center, said. "These four firefighters had no choice in the matter and that is wrong no matter what one's sexual orientation."

A spokesman for the San Diego Fire Department did not immediately respond to requests for comment. According to a receptionist, the department is processing numerous requests for reaction.

A spokeswoman for San Diego City attorney Michael Aguirre said she hadn't seen the letter requesting right-to-sue notices. "I haven't heard that they've filed," Maria Velasquez told **Cybercast News Service**.

San Diego Pride, the group that organized the event, was not immediately available for comment Monday. On its website, the group calls the parade "a powerful display of diversity, acceptance and celebration." It says the parade's mission is "to foster pride in and respect for the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender communities in San Diego."

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