

Portland, Oregon, Bars Discrimination Against Atheists, Agnostics

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An amendment to the civil rights code of Portland, Oregon, extends protections against discrimination in employment, housing, and public accommodations to atheists, agnostics, and other “non-believers.” Religious facilities are expressly exempt.

The Portland City Code, chapter 23.01, already prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, religion, gender, and national origin. The amendment, unanimously approved by the Portland City Council, will go into effect on March 29, 2019.

The new ordinance amends Portland’s civil rights ordinances to include “non-religion” as a protected class. It also broadens the definition of “religion” used in the City Code, clarifying that it “expressly includes non-religion, such as atheism, agnosticism, and non-belief in God or gods as has been recognized by the courts.”

After the new ordinance goes into effect, employees who suffer discrimination on the basis of non-religion may sue their employer or lodge a complaint with the Oregon Bureau of Labor and Industries.

Employers in Portland, as well as employers with employees who work within the city, must comply with the new ordinance. Employers should ensure compliance by updating their workplace procedures and policies, as well as their employee handbooks, and train management and employees on the procedures and policies.

Portland is the second city in the nation, after Madison, Wisconsin, to designate non-believers as a protected class.

For more information on the new ordinance and workplace procedures, policies, and training, contact the Jackson Lewis attorney(s) with whom you regularly work.

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