



Supreme Court to Hear Arguments on North Carolina Law Banning Sex Offenders from Facebook

The U.S. Supreme Court will hear arguments Monday on whether a North Carolina law banning sex offenders from social media sites like Facebook is unconstitutional.

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The case involves Lester Packingham Jr., 36, a registered sex offender who posted on Facebook back in 2010 celebrating his dismissed traffic ticket, according to the [SCOTUS blog](#).

“God is Good! How about I got so much favor they dismissed the ticket before court even started? No fine, no court costs, no nothing spent... Praise be to GOD, WOW! Thanks JESUS!” he wrote.

But Packingham violated a 2008 state law that bans registered sex offenders from accessing commercial social media sites open to those under the age of 18, [UPI](#) reported.

Packingham received a suspended sentence for having sex with a 13-year-old girl he claimed to be dating when he was 21 years old. He was convicted of indecent liberties of a minor and was required to register as a sex offender, “a designation that lasts 30 years.” Packingham did not commit any other sex offenses after his first conviction.

“A Durham, N.C., police officer who had logged onto Facebook to see whether any registered sex offenders had been using the site” when he found Packingham’s post. The officer investigated and found that Packingham had used an alias instead of his real name, the [Associated Press](#) reported.

Packingham was prosecuted, convicted of a felony, and received a suspended sentence despite his lawyers’ argument that the 2008 law infringes upon his First Amendment right to freedom of speech.

An intermediate state appellate court overturned his conviction, but the state supreme court reversed the ruling and reinstated it.

North Carolina argues that the law protects minors from sexual abuse, [NPR](#) reports.

“It blinks reality to suggest that sexual predators do not use social media to further their crimes,” the state maintains.

Lawyers for Packingham say the ban extends beyond social media and restricts sex offenders from other online activities that do not involve interactions with children.

“It’s a crime to do anything, including what Mr. Packingham did, which was to say ‘God is good’ because he was victorious in traffic court,” said Stanford law professor David Goldberg, who will represent Packingham at the Supreme Court Monday. “There’s never been any suggestion that he was up to anything but exercising his freedom of speech.”

The Cato Institute and the American Civil Liberties Union are backing Packingham and argue that the law could prevent sex offenders from using social media to look for a job or read the news.

“North Carolina appears to be the only state that currently prohibits all registered sex offenders from social media sites. Other states restrict Internet use as a condition of parole or ban from social networking sites only those who commit certain crimes,” reports UPI.