



Isaac M. Jaroslawicz
Executive Director
imj@aleph-institute.org

P ❖ 305.864.5553
F ❖ 305.864.8269
C ❖ 305.775.7868

**FOR IMMEDIATE
RELEASE**

Kosher Meals Denied to Inmate Leads to Lawsuit

Miami, FL - (September 20, 2002) A lawsuit filed today in the US District Court for the Southern District of Florida seeks to obtain a permanent injunction requiring Florida state prisons to provide Jewish inmates with a nutritionally-sufficient kosher diet. "Federal prisons throughout the country and at least nineteen state departments of correction routinely provide kosher food," according to Isaac M. Jaroslawicz of Miami's Aleph Institute. "Here in Florida, Even the county jails provide kosher food to those who require it, including South Florida's Miami-Dade, Broward, and Palm Beach Counties."

The action filed on behalf of Alan Cotton, a Jewish inmate at Florida's Everglades Correctional Institution, argues that the department's refusal to provide him with kosher food illegally burdens his exercise of religious freedom guaranteed by the Religious Land Use and Institutionalized Persons Act of 2000 ("RLUIPA"), the Florida Religious Freedom Restoration Act of 1998, and the U.S. and Florida constitutions.

Jaroslawicz speaks with an air of authority; he was one of the key witnesses involved in congressional hearings leading up to the enactment of RLUIPA. "This issue has recently been decided in three US Circuit Courts of Appeals, always in the inmates' favor," Jaroslawicz contends. "The courts universally found that inmates were entitled to a nutritionally-sufficient diet consistent with their religious needs. Alan's request is legitimate and sincere, and necessary for his practice and observance of the Jewish faith."

As Executive Director of Aleph's Center for Religious Freedom and Family Advocacy, Jaroslawicz coordinates the non-profit organization's national advocacy program to guarantee religious freedom for individuals in institutionalized environments. Recognized as an expert in this area, he was stunned at the lack of action taken by Florida Governor Jeb Bush in this particular case.

"It is surprising that someone such as Bush, who repeatedly stands for faith-based accommodation in all areas of government, would allow his department of corrections to blatantly turn their back on the Jewish faith," states Jaroslawicz. "Although the Florida Department of Corrections provides diets for every other type of inmate, they absolutely refused to provide a diet necessary for a Jew to live."

For nearly a quarter of a century, the Aleph Institute has conducted faith-based educational and rehabilitation programs, and actively involved in lawsuits involving religious freedom in many states. It annually provides professional services to nearly 4,000 men and women in

federal and state prisons across the country and their approximately 25,000 spouses, children and parents left behind. Aleph has worked with Cotton and nearly 400 other Jewish inmates with respect to their ongoing religious needs. Cotton is represented by The Becket Fund for Religious Liberty, one of Washington's leading advocacy groups on behalf of RLUIPA and religious freedom.

* * 439 words * *

For more information: Isaac M. Jaroslawicz [The Aleph Institute, <http://www.aleph-institute.org>] at (305) 775-7868 or Patrick Korten [The Becket Fund for Religious Liberty, <http://www.becketfund.org>] at (202) 955-0095

