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by The Associated Press

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The Archdiocese of Milwaukee filed a lawsuit on May 7 demanding state corrections officials relax COVID-19 protocols and allow ministers to visit incarcerated people.

The archdiocese alleges in the filing that the Department of Corrections adopted a policy in March 2020 banning volunteer visits. The policy has prevented clergy from the archdiocese from meeting in-person with incarcerated people to provide spiritual guidance, communion and penance, [violating a state law](#) that grants clergy of all faiths weekly visits with prisoners and incarcerated peoples' constitutional right to freedom of religion.

Attorneys and DOC employees such as psychologists and social workers have been allowed to see [incarcerated people](#) since March 2020 if the visitors follow health and safety protocols such as temperature checks, COVID-19 tests and masks, according to the lawsuit. But those protocols don't apply to clergy, the archdiocese contends.

The lawsuit demands that a judge order the DOC to allow clergy to visit prisoners immediately.

Asked for comment on the lawsuit, Corrections spokesman John Beard said in a statement that the department wants to expand in-person visitation and volunteer programs as soon as public health experts deem it safe to do so. Vaccinations will help speed that goal, he said. He did not address the merits of the lawsuits itself.

Conservative law firm Wisconsin Institute for Law and Liberty filed the lawsuit on behalf of the archdiocese in Jefferson County.

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