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## Court orders pagan parents to 'protect' son

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INDIANAPOLIS - A Wiccan activist and his ex-wife are challenging a court's order that they must protect their 9-year-old son from what it calls their "non-mainstream religious beliefs and rituals."

The Indiana Civil Liberties Union has appealed the stipulation written into the couple's divorce order, saying it is unconstitutionally vague because it does not define mainstream religion.

Thomas Jones, a Wiccan activist who has coordinated Pagan Pride Day in Indianapolis for six years, said he and his ex-wife, Tammy Bristol, were stunned by the order. Neither parent has taken their son to any Wiccan rituals since it was issued, he said.

"We both had an instant resolve to challenge it. We could not accept it," Jones said Thursday.

A court commissioner wrote the unusual order after a routine report by the court's Domestic Relations Counseling Bureau noted that both Jones and his ex-wife are pagans who send their son, Archer, to a Catholic elementary school.

In the order, the parents were "directed to take such steps as are needed to shelter Archer from involvement and observation of these non-mainstream religious beliefs and rituals." The judge let the wording stand.

Barry Lynn, executive director of the Washington, D.C.-based Americans United for Separation of Church and State, said judges cannot substitute their religious judgment for that of parents in regard to the upbringing of children.

"This is an absurd result, because in the eyes of the law being a pagan should be no different from being a Presbyterian," he said.

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