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She's a Spirit Counselor, Not a Fortune Teller

By RYAN ABBOTT

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RICHMOND, Va. (CN) - A woman who reads tarot cards says she's not a fortune teller, she's a "spiritual counselor ... motivated by fundamental religious principles and beliefs," so a Virginia county cannot demand that she pay a \$300 business tax or restrict her business to an industrial zone.

In her federal complaint, Sophie King says she is "not interested in future events," but offers spiritual counseling through "tarot, Reiki, energy healing, astrology and psychic, clairvoyant, clairaudient, and medium abilities."

She claims Chesterfield County unconstitutionally classifies her as "engaged in the occupation of occult sciences," and subject to its business tax and zoning rules. King says the tax is excessive and violates her First Amendment rights. She points out that other businesses, including itinerant merchants and peddlers, adult businesses and nightclubs pay significantly less in taxes.

King says a county official who refused to provide his or her name has demanded she pay \$343, which includes penalties and late fees. The official also demanded she obtain five signatures from residents who believe she is of "good moral character" and submit to a background investigation by police.

She says Chesterfield County also informed her that her business was not in its proper zone because regulations allow fortune tellers to operate only in industrial areas.

King insists she belongs in her current building, which also hosts psychologists and marriage counselors. She says she's been forced to shut down her business because of Chesterfield's unfair regulations.

She asks the court to declare the county's business license requirements for "fortune tellers" invalid and unconstitutional. She also seeks compensatory damages for lost revenue, and attorney fees.

She is represented by Chandra Lantz with Hirschler Fleischer. 



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