



U.S. Department of Justice

Office of Justice Programs

*Office for Civil Rights*

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Washington, D.C. 20531

May 12, 2020

VIA CERTIFIED MAIL

Annie Lobert  
President and Founder  
Hookers for Jesus  
10120 W. Flamingo Road, Suite 4-506  
Las Vegas, NV 89147

Re: *Notice of Findings*  
*OCR Complaint No. 20-OCR-0660*

Dear Ms. Lobert:

The Office for Civil Rights (OCR), Office of Justice Programs (OJP), U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) has received your March 13, 2020, correspondence regarding the above-referenced administrative Complaint. In this Complaint, a third-party complainant (Complainant) expressed concern regarding Hookers for Jesus' (HFJ)<sup>1</sup> expenditure of DOJ grant funding. Relying on media accounts and other publicly available information, the Complainant essentially alleged that the HFJ, and its principal social service organization, Destiny House, requires clients to participate in religious activities, attend church services, and volunteer at a church in order to receive services. The Complainant further alleged that clients of the HFJ must "accept or endure" Christian proselytizing in order to receive services. The Complainant noted that the HFJ denies that Christian worship is mandatory for clients or that it attempts to convert clients to Christianity. The OCR has reviewed all of the information before us, and has determined that the HFJ's current use of DOJ grant funding complies with applicable federal civil rights requirements.

The OCR has the administrative responsibility for ensuring that recipients of DOJ financial assistance do not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, disability, sex, religion, and age, and, in some cases, sexual orientation and gender identity. The laws that the OCR enforces include the DOJ's regulations on Partnerships with Faith-Based and Other Neighborhood Organizations, 28 C.F.R. pt. 38 (Part 38). Part 38 prohibits agencies receiving direct DOJ financial assistance from using such assistance to engage in explicitly religious activities. 28 C.F.R. § 38.5(a). "Explicitly religious activities" include activities that involve overt religious content such as worship, religious instruction, or proselytization. *Id.* If a

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<sup>1</sup> According to the HFJ's website at <https://www.hookersforjesus.net>, the HFJ is a non-profit organization that provides transitional support to those individuals seeking to exit the sex industry. The HFJ's stated vision includes providing spiritual, emotional, and physical wellness to those it serves.

recipient conducts explicitly religious activities, the recipient must offer the activities separately, in time or location, from programs or services funded under the grant. *Id.* Furthermore, participation in any religious activities must be voluntary for beneficiaries of the grant-funded programs or services. *Id.* Part 38 makes clear that a faith-based or religious organization that receives DOJ financial assistance may continue to carry out its mission, including the practice and expression of its religious beliefs, as long as it does not use direct DOJ financial assistance to support any explicitly religious activities. *Id.* at 38.5(b).

The DOJ's funding records demonstrate that the HFJ received a grant award for \$530,190.00 from the OJP's Office for Victims of Crime, for a three-year grant period from January 1, 2020 to December 31, 2022. According to the HFJ's grant application, the HFJ will use the DOJ grant funding for its Southern Nevada Human Trafficking Services Project. The HFJ stated in its application that DOJ funds will enable the HFJ and its safe house/shelter Destiny House to plan for needed services, strengthen agency infrastructure, formalize linkages with community partner agencies, and organize a multi-disciplinary Service Advisory Committee to facilitate the coordination of services. The HFJ indicated that DOJ funds will specifically be used for all or part of the salary and benefits of several personnel; costs associated with the travel to grantee meetings; office, training, and advisory meeting supplies; a contract for the services of an action researcher; and an annual audit and liability insurance.

In a March 13, 2020, letter to the HFJ, the OCR notified the HFJ of the allegations contained in the Complaint and requested that it provide the OCR with some specific information regarding its utilization of DOJ grant funding. The HFJ responded on April 10, 2020.

In its response, the HFJ said that during the first year of the grant implementation, the HFJ will not expend DOJ grant funding on any direct services or outreach to clients, including services provided at Destiny House. According to the HFJ, during the first year, it will utilize DOJ grant funding for activities such as convening and chairing the Service Advisory Committee, conducting community education activities, collecting data, and developing an action plan to address unmet needs of victims of human trafficking. The HFJ said that in years two and three of grant implementation, it does intend to expend DOJ funding on the salaries and benefits of staff providing direct services to clients, including services that it provides at Destiny House. The HFJ indicated that DOJ-funded direct services will include the supervision of case managers, client intake and referral to available services, and identifying and recruiting clients for Destiny House.

The information provided by the HFJ indicates that the HFJ is not currently expending DOJ grant funding on services provided by Destiny House or any other direct services to clients or beneficiaries, and it will not be doing so during this first year of grant implementation which ends December 31, 2020. Therefore, even if the Complaint's allegations are true and clients of Destiny House are being required to participate in explicitly religious activities, the HFJ is not in violation of Part 38 because the explicitly religious activities are separate from the DOJ-funded activities and the HFJ currently is not using DOJ funding to support them.

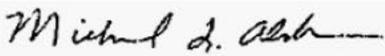
Based on the foregoing, the OCR is administratively closing this Complaint. This finding notwithstanding, the HFJ has a continuing obligation to comply with Part 38. Upon receipt of

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this letter, please contact OCR attorney Shelley Langguth at [REDACTED] to discuss a timeframe for developing a plan to ensure compliance with Part 38 in years two and three of the HFJ's grant award. In developing such a plan, the HFJ should review the OCR's website at <https://www.ojp.gov/program/civil-rights/partnerships-faith-based-and-other-neighborhood-organizations> for guidance for faith-based organizations on complying with federal rights laws, including the full text of Part 38 and Frequently Asked Questions on Part 38. Additionally, Ms. Langguth is available upon request to provide the HFJ with technical assistance in structuring any grant-funded services in a manner that complies with Part 38 and applicable federal civil rights laws.

Thank you for your cooperation with the OCR's review of this Complaint.

Sincerely,

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Michael L. Alston  
Director  
Signed by: MICHAEL ALSTON