

**UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
MIDDLE DISTRICT OF FLORIDA
ORLANDO DIVISION**

_____)	
SOUL QUEST CHURCH OF MOTHER)		
EARTH, INC. and CHRISTOPHER)		
YOUNG,)		
)		
Plaintiffs,)		
)		
vs.)	No. 6:20-cv-701-WBB-DCI	
)		
ATTORNEY GENERAL, UNITED)		
STATES OF AMERICA and ACTNG)	JOINT MOTION TO STAY ALL	
ADMINISTRATOR, U.S. DRUG)	PROCEEDINGS FOR 120 DAYS	
ENFORCEMENT ADMINISTRATION,)		
)		
Defendants.)		
_____)	

JOINT MOTION TO STAY ALL PROCEEDINGS FOR 120 DAYS

The Parties hereby jointly move for a 120-day stay of all proceedings in this case to allow time for Defendant the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration (“DEA”) to conduct the fact-finding that is necessary for it to adjudicate Plaintiffs’ pending petition for a religious exemption from the Controlled Substances Act (“CSA”), which is at issue in this litigation. A 120-day stay would also allow time for the parties to negotiate the details of the DEA’s fact-finding process and to negotiate a timeline upon which the DEA would issue a final determination on Plaintiffs’ Petition, potentially resolving this case without need for further litigation in this Court. The parties submit that good cause exists for the requested stay for the following reasons:

1. On May 4, 2020, Plaintiffs filed an Amended Complaint for Declaratory and Permanent Injunctive Relief, ECF No. 13 (“Complaint”), and an Amended Petition for Preliminary Injunction, ECF No. 15.

2. Plaintiff Soul Quest Church of Mother Earth, Inc. (“Soul Quest”) alleges that it is a Christian syncretic religion based in Orlando, Florida, whose members “seek to practice their religious rituals, which involve the sacramental consumption of trace amounts of a Schedule 1 chemical” called dimethyltryptamine, which is regulated by the CSA. Compl. ¶¶ 1, 3, 60. Plaintiff Christopher Young is a member of Soul Quest. *Id.* ¶ 2.

3. The Defendants are the Attorney General of the United States and the Acting Administrator of the DEA. Compl. ¶¶ 11-12. The DEA considers applications for religious-based exemptions from the CSA pursuant to the Religious Freedom Restoration Act (“RFRA”), 42 U.S.C. § 2000bb, *et seq.*, on a case-by-case basis. *See* Ex. 11 to Am. Pet. for Prelim. Inj. (May 4, 2020), ECF No. 15-12.

4. At issue in this litigation is a petition Plaintiffs have filed with the DEA for a religious exemption from the CSA pursuant to RFRA (“Petition”). *See* Compl. ¶ 14. The Complaint alleges that the current absence of a final determination on the Petition constitutes an “effective denial” of that Petition that violates RFRA and the First, Fifth, and Fourteenth Amendments to the U.S. Constitution. *See, e.g.*, Compl. ¶¶ 3, 73.

5. On May 14, 2020, the Parties filed a Joint Motion to Extend Defendants’ Time to Respond to Plaintiffs’ Amended Motion for Preliminary Injunction. ECF No. 18. The Parties explained that good cause existed for the requested extension, in part, because it would allow them “time to explore whether resolution is possible.” ECF No. 18 ¶ 3.

6. On May 14, 2020, the Court entered an Endorsed Order granting the Parties' requested extension. ECF No. 19. Defendants' response to Plaintiffs' Amended Petition for Preliminary Injunction is currently due by June 17, 2020.

7. On May 29, 2020, DEA issued an initial letter responding to Plaintiffs' Petition. The agency asserts it requires certain additional information in order to evaluate the Petition. (*See Ex. A.*)

8. Since the Court granted the parties' requested extension, the Parties have continued to engage in good-faith negotiations regarding Plaintiffs' Petition and the course of this litigation.

9. The power to stay proceedings is "incidental to the power inherent in every court to control the disposition of the causes on its docket with economy of time and effort for itself, for counsel, and for litigants." *Landis v. N. Am. Co.*, 299 U.S. 248, 254-55 (1936). Courts generally examine three factors when determining whether to grant a stay: "(1) whether a stay will unduly prejudice or tactically disadvantage the non-moving party; (2) whether a stay will simplify the issues and streamline the trial; and (3) whether a stay will reduce the burden of litigation on the parties and on the court." *Scoma Chiropractic, P.A. v. Dental Equities, LLC*, 2:16-CV-41-FTM-99MRM, 2018 WL 2455301, at *2 (M.D. Fla. June 1, 2018); *see, e.g., Technocable Wiring Specialist, Inc. v. Genesis Networks Telecom Servs., LLC*, No. 8:16-CV-2590-T-35MAP, 2017 WL 7311851, at *1 (M.D. Fla. June 15, 2017) (granting a joint motion to stay because it would "promote efficiency, conserve both judicial and the Parties' resources, and potentially resolve the matter altogether").

10. The Parties submit that the requested 120-day stay could potentially simplify the issues in the case and reduce the burden of litigation on the parties and the Court, while not causing prejudice to either Party. The requested stay would accomplish these goals by providing additional time for the Parties to further negotiate and for the DEA to conduct the necessary fact-finding process in an expeditious manner with the ultimate goal of issuing a final determination on Plaintiffs' Petition.

11. If granted, the Parties resolve to take the following steps during the 120-day stay: (a) Plaintiffs will respond to DEA's May 29, 2020 request for additional information; (b) the Parties will continue to negotiate the process by which DEA will conduct the fact-finding necessary to evaluate Plaintiffs' Petition; (c) the Parties will continue to negotiate a timeline upon which DEA will agree to issue a final determination on Plaintiffs' Petition once DEA's fact-finding is completed; and (d) DEA will conduct and complete the fact-finding that is necessary for it to subsequently evaluate and issue a final determination on Plaintiffs' Petition.

12. The Parties agree that if the stay is granted they will cooperate with each other in good faith and make all reasonable efforts within their control to ensure that the five steps described in Paragraph 11 are completed within the requested 120-day stay. The Parties further propose that they submit a joint status report to this Court one week prior to the expiration of the stay to advise the Court of their progress, including whether DEA was able to complete its fact-finding with Plaintiffs' cooperation during the 120-day stay and whether additional time will be needed for DEA to issue a final determination on Plaintiffs' Petition in light of the facts collected.

13. If the Parties' requested stay is denied, Defendants respectfully request in the alternative that the Court grant a 14-day extension of Defendants' deadline to respond to Plaintiffs' Amended Petition for Preliminary Injunction, ECF No. 15, from June 17, 2020 to July 1, 2020. Counsel for Defendants conferred with counsel for Plaintiffs regarding this alternative request and counsel for Plaintiffs advised that Plaintiffs do not oppose Defendants' alternative request.

Certificate of Compliance with Local Rule 3.01(g)

On June 12, 2020, the parties' undersigned counsel conferred in good faith regarding the relief requested by this joint motion. During that conference, undersigned counsel for both parties agreed to join this joint motion for a 120-day of all proceedings on the terms described above.

For the foregoing reasons, the parties respectfully request that the Court enter a 120-day stay of all proceedings in this case.

Dated: June 15, 2020

/s/ Derek B. Brett
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Respectfully submitted,

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Counsel for Defendants

CERTIFICATE OF SERVICE

I hereby certify that on June 15, 2020, I electronically filed a copy of the foregoing Joint Motion to Stay All Proceedings for 120 Days. Notice of the filing will be sent by email to all parties by operation of the Court's electronic filing system. Parties may access this filing through the Court's CM/ECF system.

/s/ Kevin P. Hancock

KEVIN P. HANCOCK

EXHIBIT A



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Derek B. Brett, Esq.
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Dear Mr. Brett:

This letter concerns the petition for religious exemption which you presented to the United States Department of Justice, Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), on behalf of your client, Soul Quest Ayahuasca Church of Mother Earth, Inc. (Soul Quest), d/b/a the Soul Quest Ayahuasca Retreat and Wellness Center (“Wellness Center”), as well as the First Amended Complaint (FAC) (ECF No. 13) and motion for preliminary injunction (Motion) (ECF No. 15) which you recently filed in *Soul Quest v. Barr*, Case No. 6:20-cv-00701 (M.D. Fla.). Thank you for these materials, which have contributed to our review of the petition. We look forward to opening a dialogue with you and your client to clarify the religious nature of Soul Quest’s practices under the Religious Freedom Restoration Act (RFRA) and to explore accommodation of those practices within the comprehensive regulatory scheme established by the Controlled Substances Act (CSA), as amended.

Through the CSA, Congress established a comprehensive scheme to regulate the importation, manufacture, and distribution of substances which have legitimate medical uses, but potential for diversion from authorized channels. Title 21, United States Code §§ 801 (U.S.C. §§ 801) *et seq.* Under the CSA, all individuals and entities which import, manufacture, and distribute controlled substances must be registered by DEA. DEA implements the CSA through comprehensive regulations governing registration, labeling and packaging, quotas, recordkeeping and reporting, security and storage, and periodic inspections, among other things. *See* Title 21, Code of Federal Regulations §§ 1300-1316 (CFR §§ 1300-1316). The regulations implementing the CSA impose consistent requirements upon all handlers of controlled substances which govern controlled substances, addressing import, export, manufacture, distribution, diversion, public safety, storage, administration, recordkeeping, and disposal. To minimize the risk of diversion, registrants must, for example, maintain records and make those records available for inspection and audit; they must also identify the locations at which controlled substances are stored and manufactured. DEA routinely inspects and assesses the security practices in effect at such locations.

Under RFRA, Congress provided that the “Government shall not substantially burden a person’s exercise of religion” unless the Government can demonstrate “that application of the burden to the person . . . is in furtherance of a compelling governmental interest and . . . is the least restrictive means of furthering that compelling governmental interest.” 42 U.S.C. § 2000bb-1. These

competing mandates require the DEA to consider the “application of the [CSA] to the person—the particular claimant whose sincere exercise of religion is being substantially burdened” and engage in a “case-by-case consideration of religious exemptions to generally applicable rules” so that it may “strike sensible balances” of interests based on “the particular practice at issue.” *Gonzales v. O Centro Espirita Beneficente Uniao do Vegetal*, 546 U.S. 418, 430-31, 436, 439 (2006) (internal quotation marks omitted).

In compliance with *Gonzalez, supra*, DEA promulgated interim guidelines to facilitate the process by which parties can seek exemption from particular regulations implementing the CSA that would substantially burden their religious exercise. Under this process, DEA can grant appropriate registrant status to religious applicants, thus bringing the religious use of the controlled substance within the CSA’s comprehensive regulatory scheme. DEA can also waive application to the religious organization of particular regulatory requirements, such as registration fees. Recognizing that DEA’s regulatory requirements for security were developed for commercial environments, DEA will work with the religious registrant to revise security requirements to meet the specific situation of the non-profit applicant. DEA will also work with the applicant to tailor specific provisions of the regulatory scheme to minimize diversion and safety risks presented by the “particular practice at issue.” *Gonzales*, 546 U.S. at 439. DEA therefore routinely requests detailed information on petitions for exemptions from the CSA, as outlined in the guidelines. After careful consideration of the materials already provided, DEA asks that Soul Quest answer the following questions and provide the information requested below.

The Organization and Belief System of Soul Quest

Soul Quest’s organization and religious belief system appear to have evolved in some respects between 2017 and the present. We welcome this opportunity to obtain the most up-to-date information. The undated and unsigned “By Laws” attached to Soul Quest’s Motion (ECF No. 15-3) provide, for example, that “[t]he name of this organization, shall be the Oklevueha Native American Church of Soul Quest (ONACSSQ)” and state: “we will educate others in our town in Georgia, the USA and in various locations anywhere in the world...” How does the ONACSSQ relate to Soul Quest? Does Soul Quest currently conduct any ceremonies with or provide ayahuasca and/or ayahuasca components to or receive ayahuasca and/or ayahuasca components from any individuals or organizations in Georgia, or any locations in the United States other than Orlando, Florida? If so, please identify the name and location of each such organization and explain the organizational relationship of each to Soul Quest.

The “Foundation Document” provided with the Motion (ECF No. 15-5) contains the following statement: “...we have para-church ministries and Indigenous Native American religion based auxiliaries,” while the Doctrinal Statement (ECF No. 15-8) is described as applicable to “any Authorized Branch.” Please provide the name and location of all “ministries,” “auxiliaries,” and “Authorized Branches” and explain their organizational relationship to Soul Quest.

In paragraph one of the FAC, Soul Quest is described as “a Christian syncretic religion based in Orlando, Florida.” Other documents, however, contain no reference to Christianity, but profess belief in “Mother Earth,” “Father Sky,” and/or the “Great Spirit.” (*See, e.g.*, ECF Nos. 15 ¶ 25, 15-3.) The flyer attached to the Motion, ECF No. 15-13, describes Soul Quest as believing in “the rights of Mother Earth and in protecting the practice of Mother Earth based South American

spiritual traditions, ceremonies, and sacred indigenous natural medicines.” Please clarify Soul Quest’s relationship, as applicable, with Christianity, Mother Earth, Father Sky, and/or the Great Spirit. In the petition, the “Ayahuasca Manifesto” is described as a sacred document. Is Exhibit 3 to the FAC, ECF Nos. 13-4 and 13-5, that sacred document? If not, can you provide a copy of the sacred document?

The Doctrinal Statement states that Soul Quest and its Authorized Branches “accept all natural substances and their derivatives” for ceremonial use. Has Soul Quest or the Wellness Center used any controlled substance other than ayahuasca in their ceremonies or wellness activities since January 2017? If so, identify each such controlled substance and identify the date(s), place(s), and context(s) in which it was administered and how it relates to Soul Quest’s sincere religious beliefs.

On page 13, the petition stated that there is no charge to participate in the sacrament of ayahuasca. An attachment to the petition, entitled: “Information About Our Weekend Retreats,” stated: “[w]e do not charge for the medicine, but for the work of accompaniment and supervision, for meals and accommodation, and for the translation of the facilitators from the country in which you are staying.” The attachment listed the cost of the ayahuasca ceremony as \$175 per session for a two night minimum, or a total cost of \$350, as well as additional costs for various levels of accommodations and other optional ceremonies. How much are members and authorized participants charged for ayahuasca administration during weekend retreats? Does Soul Quest or the Wellness Center currently conduct ayahuasca ceremonies at any location other than the Wellness Center? If so, please provide the pricing schedule.

The flyer attached to the Motion, ECF No. 15-13, indicates that the Wellness Center offers a wide range of therapeutic services, including ayahuasca administration, “psycho-spiritual integration,” naturopathy, yoga, breathwork, reiki/energy medicine, acupuncture, smoking cessation, and kambo, which we gather is a traditional South American cleansing ritual using the poison of a frog. Are these therapeutic services offered in connection with ayahuasca ceremonies, or are they available independently of those ceremonies? Please explain the relationship of these services to the religious beliefs and mission of Soul Quest. We also note that a letter attached to Soul Quest’s petition indicates that the Orange County Board of Zoning limited sound devices or amplification of music at the Wellness Center and limited it to no more than four special outdoor events, “which shall not include religious or spiritual retreats.” This implies that non-religious outdoor events may be held at the Wellness Center. Please explain.

In the FAC and several supporting documents, Soul Quest is described as d/b/a (doing business as) the Wellness Center. On page 9 of the Foundation Declaration (ECF No. 15-5), however, the Wellness Center is described as an “independent branch or Free Church” of Soul Quest. Please clarify the organizational and financial relationship between the two entities. Does Plaintiff Lewis draw any financial compensation from the Wellness Center? If so, please state the total compensation he received each year from 2017 through 2019.

Soul Quest’s Procurement, Storage, Distribution, and Disposal of Ayahuasca

Does Soul Quest import ayahuasca in tea form, or does it import the plants used in making the tea? In either case, identify the source of the imported materials, the quantity imported each year since January 2017, the location(s) where the materials are stored, and all individuals who have had

access to the stored materials. If the tea is prepared in the United States, please state where and by whom the tea is prepared, where and how it is stored, and state the relationship between the amount of plant material used and the number of doses of tea manufactured.

Does Soul Quest provide the tea to any other individuals or organizations outside Soul Quest's ceremonies at the Wellness Center in Orlando? If so, state when, where, and to whom the tea was distributed.

If Soul Quest has developed written policies or directives governing security, recordkeeping and storage protocols for controlled substances, please provide copies. If not, please provide a detailed description of Soul Quest's current practices. Additionally, please identify the individuals in charge of security, recordkeeping, storage, and the dispensing of the controlled substances and provide the full names of the individuals described as members of the "team" in the Wellness Center flyer (ECF No. 15-13). In order to have all of the information necessary for DEA to reach a determination on Soul Quest's petition and determine its eligibility for DEA registration to import, manufacture, and distribute a schedule I controlled substance, DEA Diversion Investigators must conduct interviews of these individuals and other leaders and managers, assess the security and recordkeeping measures in place, and recommend any upgrades needed to minimize the risk of diversion and protect safety. Site visits and inspections will follow.

If all tea that has been prepared is not used at an ayahuasca ceremony, or if a batch of tea is no longer usable, how will Soul Quest dispose of the unused or expired tea? As you will appreciate, the disposal of unused substances which contain controlled substances, such as prescription medicines, can present environmental and public safety concerns, as well as concerns of diversion into illicit markets. Has Soul Quest developed any protocols or standard practices for the proper disposal of unused or expired controlled substances, including but not limited to ayahuasca tea and plant residues? Does it maintain records documenting disposal or destruction?

The Code of Ethics attached to the Motion, ECF No. 13-6, describes the primary purpose of Soul Quest as "to administer Sacramental Ceremonies." It also states that both "members" and "Authorized Participants" can take part in the "Ayahuasca Ceremony." What is the difference between a "member" and an "Authorized Participant?" What criteria are used to "authorize" a non-member "participant" to ingest ayahuasca with Soul Quest?

In paragraph 50 of the FAC, Soul Quest alleges that it offers ayahuasca ceremonies three times per month and that 60 to 80 individuals participate in the ceremony with the support of 20 "facilitators," including a "licensed physician as medical director, a licensed paramedic, a licensed emergency medical technician, a psychologist, and a research scientist." Please identify the individuals who currently perform these functions and describe their qualifications, professional education and licensures, and confirm that Soul Quest will make these individuals available to speak with DEA Diversion Investigators at the parties' convenience.

Your petition on page 14 states that participants must complete and return a medical form, and attached thereto was a document titled: "Medical Form." Is that form still in use? If not, please provide a copy of the current medical form. Were any medical professionals consulted in the creation of this form? What scientific literature or studies, if any, provide the basis for the contents of the form? If a participant indicates that they do have a history of one or more of the listed

ailments, is he or she permitted to participate? How is private medical information protected? Are women who are pregnant, nursing, or on birth control allowed to partake in the ayahuasca ceremony? At what age can participants consent to participate in the ayahuasca ceremony? How is age of the participants verified? What protocols are put into place to ensure minors do not have access to controlled substances?

Part III “Safety & Security and Protocols for Ayahuasca Ceremonies”, Section C.5 of the petition states: “Soul Quest has developed an emergency plan for various scenarios, and has educated its facilitation team to know and understand what steps to take in case of an emergency.” Please provide a copy of the emergency plan and describe any training given to “facilitators” in how to respond if a medical emergency arises during or immediately after a ceremony.

Please provide a list of all emergencies or other critical situations which have arisen during or immediately after ayahuasca ceremonies since January 2017, including a brief description of the event, the Emergency Medical Service (EMS) and/or law enforcement agency contacted, and the outcome of the event. Additionally, please describe and explain the actions Soul Quest took related to the April 1, 2018 medical emergency involving Brandon Begley. Since that emergency, has Soul Quest modified its safety protocols and procedures? If so, please explain how. On page 17, the petition states that Soul Quest works with local EMS personnel and/or police if additional assistance is needed for any emergency or other critical situation. Please provide copies of any documentation memorializing these arrangements and identify the local agencies with which Soul Quest works.

DEA looks forward to your responses to these questions, which will enable us to move forward with our case-specific analysis of Soul Quest’s petition and consideration of how best to accommodate religious beliefs and practices within the CSA’s comprehensive regulatory scheme.

Sincerely,

Thomas W. Prevoznik
Deputy Assistant Administrator
Diversion Control Division