

Coffee chain sues IHOPKC, alleges Bickle scandal caused major financial harm

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A local coffee chain that leased two storefronts from the International House of Prayer-Kansas City is suing the global ministry, saying its handling of the sex abuse scandal involving founder Mike Bickle caused the business “substantial financial harm.”

Jouby Bean LLC, which operates as Prefix Coffee, alleges that after sexual abuse allegations erupted against Bickle in October 2023, the 24/7 prayer movement committed “a series of misrepresentations, false statements, and breaches of contract” regarding its lease.

“IHOPKC knew for years that wide-spread sexual abuse had corrupted the sectarian organization,” the lawsuit says. “A report from an independent investigation completed in early 2019 (the ‘GRACE Report’) explicitly warned IHOPKC leaders that multiple victims and witnesses of the abuse had come forward and that immediate remedial measures were required.

“Yet, IHOPKC disregarded this advice and concealed these facts from Prefix during the parties’ subsequent business dealings.”

The six-count suit, filed this week in Jackson County Circuit Court against International House of Prayer-Forerunner Christian Fellowship, seeks damages in excess of \$25,000 as well as attorneys’ costs and other expenses.

IHOPKC officials did not respond to requests for comment.

Bickle, who founded IHOPKC in 1999, is accused of using prophecies



Screenshot

Mike Bickle, founder of IHOPKC

to groom, sexually abuse and manipulate women over multiple decades, one starting when she was just 14. He issued his only public statement about the allegations on Dec. 12, 2023, admitting that he had “sinned” and “my moral failures were real.” He said his “inappropriate behavior” occurred more than 20 years earlier, but he did not admit to engaging in any sexual misconduct.

Ten days later, IHOPKC announced it was “immediately, formally and permanently” separating from Bickle, saying it had confirmed “a level of inappropriate behavior” involving the well-known charismatic leader.

In February, an independent investigation found that Bickle committed sexual abuse or misconduct against 17 women — some when they were minors — over decades, amid a thriving culture of systemic abuse and cover-ups within the prayer movement.

According to the Jouby Bean lawsuit, Prefix Coffee’s owners had enrolled at IHOP University (IHO-PU) in 2010. At the time, it says, IHOPKC had more than 1,000 staff members and a student body at IHO-

PU of about 1,000.

In October 2016, Prefix took over the operations of the coffee shop in the IHO-PU building at 12905 S. U.S. 71 Highway in Grandview, the lawsuit says. And on July 1, 2020, following talk about a potential partnership with IHOPKC, Prefix opened a second coffee shop at 3523 E. Red Bridge Road in south Kansas City. The shop was adjacent to IHOPKC’s worship and prayer center.

INTERNATIONAL HOUSE OF PRAYER-KANSAS CITY

Because Prefix’s business largely served those attending IHOPKC’s facilities, the lease agreements contained clauses regarding the conduct and lifestyles of all Prefix employees, according to the lawsuit.

“The Employee Clause, reflecting IHOPKC’s conservative religious principles, required that all employees of either party abstain from sexual activity outside of marriage,” the lawsuit says. “The requirement encompassed, but was not limited to, ‘cohabitation, adultery, fornication, incest, zoophilia, pornography, prostitution, voyeurism, pedophilia, exhibitionism, sodomy,

polygamy, polyamory, sologamy, or same-sex sexual acts.’”

The suit adds that “before IHOPKC breached the parties’ two written agreements, including the Employee Clause incorporated therein, Prefix paid rent on time, maintained the leased premises, and complied with all other lease requirements.”

Prefix’s business at the Red Bridge Road location was heavily dependent on patronage from worshippers at IHOPKC’s adjacent worship and prayer center, the lawsuit says. And its Grandview site relied on support from IHOP University and IHOPKC’s Forerunner Church, which was nearby.

Prefix provided capital investment in the business, the lawsuit says, including the purchase of a commercial-grade coffee roaster. In 2022, with the assurance of having a long-term partnership with IHOPKC, Prefix spent more than \$75,000 on remodeling the Red Bridge shop.

After the Bickle allegations surfaced, the lawsuit says, Prefix had regular meetings with IHOPKC’s director of operations. Those meetings included discussions “about the emerging scandal involving IHOPKC’s founder” and its potential impact on Prefix’s business relationship with IHOPKC.

In January 2024, the suit says, the director of operations told Prefix that IHOPKC might relocate all of its operations to the IHOP University campus in Grandview and close its Red Bridge prayer room.

PREFIX COFFEE

In a follow-up meeting, however, Prefix was assured “that ‘things would be okay,’ that IHOPKC was

‘doing a complete audit,’ that ‘donor losses had plateaued’ — followed by IHOPKC publicly announcing a few days later that the organization was ‘transitioning out of crisis mode’ — thus downplaying the scandal’s severity and giving Prefix a false sense of stability with respect to the parties’ business relationship,” according to the lawsuit.

But on Feb. 20, 2024, IHOPKC’s director of operations told Prefix that the organization would be closing its Red Bridge operations and that Prefix should prepare to shut down its shop at that location, the lawsuit says. And on April 2, 2024, it says, IHOPKC told Prefix that it would be closing all of its operations the next month.

Based on those representations, the suit says, Prefix made the difficult decision to shutter its Red Bridge location. It did so on May 31, 2024.

But on July 24, 2024, the suit says, IHOPKC “reversed its position completely,” issuing a public announcement that its Red Bridge operations would not close and that IHOPKC never intended to close those operations.

IHOPKC ultimately closed IHOP University and its nearby Forerunner Church in May 2024, but the 24/7 prayer room on Red Bridge Road remains open. Prefix Coffee closed its Grandview shop in late November 2024.

“IHOPKC’s contradictory statements, misrepresentations, and lack of good faith in its dealings with Prefix were made with knowledge of their falsity or with reckless disregard for the truth and were designed to protect IHOPKC’s own interests while disregarding the

devastating impact on Prefix’s business,” the lawsuit says.

Prefix has suffered substantial losses as a direct result of IHOPKC’s “unlawful actions, including its misrepresentations, contractual breaches, and negligence,” the suit alleges.

Among the losses it cites are a 48.5% drop in sales at the Red Bridge location from November 2023 to May 2024 when compared to the previous year; a 23.6% drop in sales at the Grandview shop from November 2023 to October 2024; and lost projected food sales of \$280,000 to \$300,000 per year.

The suit also claims lost bookstore and catering revenue; loss of its investment in remodeling; costs associated with closure and relocation; the inability to pay staff and satisfy financial obligations; lost past and future profits; lost business reputation; and lost business value.

Prefix has three other locations that remain open — in Midtown at 325 E. 31st St., downtown’s Lightwell building at 1100 Main St. and at The Grand, 1125 Grand Blvd.

Jouby Bean LLC has been the subject of several recent cases filed in Jackson County Circuit Court.

In November 2024, IHOPKC sued Jouby Bean LLC, claiming it owed more than \$14,000 in back rent on the Grandview coffee shop. On Dec. 5, 2024, the court issued a default judgment for restitution of the property to IHOPKC.

In June, the Missouri Department of Revenue filed four tax liens totaling about \$76,000 against Jouby Bean LLC for delinquent taxes in 2022, 2023 and 2024. And in July, the City of Kansas City was awarded a judgment of nearly \$29,000 for delinquent convention and tourism taxes, interest and penalties dating back to 2022.

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GERRYMANDERING

phone calls to the office in the last week of July. It came as momentum appears to be building for a special session that would force Missouri into a national redistricting push amid a similar effort in Texas.

“Constituents oppose redistricting of congressional districts outside the normal schedule,” the first hot topic listed on the report said. The report did not include any comments supportive of the redistricting push.

The effort comes as Trump’s political team has put pressure on lawmakers to redraw their states’ U.S. House maps so Republicans can keep control of Congress. The likely plan in Missouri would involve carving up U.S. Rep. Emanuel Cleaver’s Democratic-leaning 5th District, which includes Kansas City’s urban core and its nearby suburbs.

The move would be extraordinary. Congressional districts are typically only redrawn once every decade based on population changes released from the U.S. Census Bureau and Missouri last redistricted its map in 2022.

Cleaver and other Kansas City Democrats have

sharply criticized the effort, saying it would be met with a strong legal challenge. Opponents view the plan as a brazen and undemocratic power grab that could violate the state Constitution.

“We will not allow the voices of Kansas City to be silenced or our communities to be carved up for political gain,” state Rep. Michael Johnson, a Kansas City Democrat, said at a news conference hosted by the Missouri Legislative Black Caucus on Friday. “The 5th District is more than the lines of a map. It is our home.”

SPECIAL SESSION LOOMING?

Despite the pushback, Kehoe has expressed interest in Trump’s effort. The Republican governor gathered the state’s top legislative leaders to discuss the idea at a private meeting earlier this month, according to emails obtained by The Star.

The records also show that Kehoe recently scheduled a phone call to discuss redistricting with Indiana Gov. Mike Braun, another Republican governor who has weighed redrawing his state’s map.

Missouri lawmakers are

not currently in their annual legislative session. Therefore, Kehoe would have to call lawmakers back to Jefferson City in a special session if he wants them to redraw the map before the 2026 election.

In response to questions about the internal report, a Kehoe spokesperson said the constituent services office receives thousands of calls, emails and written communications every week. The weekly report provides Kehoe and his staff with a summary of those messages, said spokesperson Gabby Picard.

“The quotes you are referring to in the report were selected to help summarize some of the communication received by constituent services,” Picard said. “For any given topic, the messages received by the Governor’s Office are typically skewed in one direction as constituents who are in support of a topic don’t typically reach out to the office to express their opinion.”

In addition to the report, Kehoe receives information from constituents in other ways, including when he travels the state and attends meetings and events, Picard said.

“Governor Kehoe believes that Missourians want to be represented in Washington, D.C. by elected officials with common-sense, Missouri val-

ues,” Picard said. “At this time, a decision on a special session has not yet been made. The Governor will continue to consider options that provide congressional districts that best represent Missourians.”

The idea floating around Missouri GOP circles would center on drawing a map that could allow Republicans to pick up seven of the state’s eight congressional districts.

Republicans currently control six districts, and Democrats hold the 5th District in Kansas City and the 1st District in St. Louis, under the maps state lawmakers approved three years ago.

It’s unclear how exactly Republicans would split up the districts, including how many districts would be changed. However, U.S. Rep. Eric Burlison, a Missouri Republican who has spoken with Trump’s political team, suggested in an interview that voters in the Kansas City area could be split into three GOP-leaning districts.

The proposed plan would be an example of partisan gerrymandering, a phrase used to describe the practice of redrawing electoral district boundaries to favor one party over another.

While the mid-decade effort would be exceptionally rare in Missouri, it wouldn’t be the first time

Republicans have tried to gerrymander Kansas City. There are several reasons why all eyes are on Kansas City, as opposed to St. Louis, ranging from political maneuvering to civil rights and legal concerns.

Some Republicans argue that Cleaver’s district, despite swarms of Democratic voters, would be easier to carve into Republican districts than the 1st District in St. Louis. Some also feel St. Louis is most likely protected from “discriminatory” changes by the federal Voting Rights Act because it is a majority-minority district in which a racial minority group constitutes a majority of the voting-age population.

During the 2022 redistricting cycle, some Republican lawmakers fought for a so-called 7-1 map that would have eliminated Cleaver’s district. However, that effort failed after lawmakers reached a compromise that maintained the current 6-2 map.

At that time, some Republicans feared that carving up Cleaver’s Kansas City district could backfire under what’s called a “dummymander” and lead to Democrats winning other competitive districts.

As top Missouri lawmakers await a decision from Kehoe, Kansas City voters could soon play a major role in a national

fight over redistricting.

And the messages sent to the Republican governor’s office show that residents across the state, including outside the Kansas City area, are taking notice.

“To gerrymander as proposed makes me seriously worry that (policies) I support are legitimately not supported in Jeff City,” the man from the St. Louis suburbs wrote, “but that our state is controlled by a fringe minority who cannot govern fairly.”

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