

St. Pete Court Makes First Conviction Under Anti-Gay Law

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Nikolai Alekseyev during his picket near St. Petersburg City Hall on April 12.

A St. Petersburg court handed down its first conviction under the city's new anti-gay law on Friday, ordering a leading gay activist to pay a 5,000-ruble fine for his picket against the law.

The district court ruled that Nikolai Alexeyev had promoted homosexuality among minors by picketing City Hall with a sign reading, "Homosexuality Is Not a Perversion" on April 12.

As proof of its verdict, the judge read out statements from several people who had expressed concern to the court that Alexeyev's actions might harm their children, Interfax reported.

Alexeyev denied wrongdoing in court, saying, "I do not know what it means to promote homosexuality, and I do not admit my guilt."

He said his protest had aimed to show that homosexuals have the same rights as other people.

St. Petersburg has come under withering international criticism for passing the vaguely

worded law forbidding "the promotion of homosexuality to minors" in March. Several other Russian regions have similar laws, and Moscow is considering adopting one of its own. Federal lawmakers, meanwhile, have called for a national anti-gay law to ostensibly protect children.

Alexeyev promised to appeal Friday's conviction and fine of 5,000 rubles (\$170) and said he would take his case to the Constitutional Court and, if necessary, the European Court of Human Rights.

"I'm 100 percent sure that I would win in any European court," he said.

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