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## **Maine AG: Spiritual Group is Run Illegally**

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Maine's attorney general is suing the Kittery-based nonprofit Gentle Wind Project, alleging 13 violations of the state's Unfair Trade Practices Act.

Gentle Wind, which describes itself as a spiritual group dedicated to emotional and physical healing, has been the subject of controversy for some time.

Two former members created the [www.windofchanges.org](http://www.windofchanges.org) website, which describes Gentle Wind as a cult that manipulated followers into behavior that included group sex rituals. The two parties have been in litigation over defamation claims since 2004.

Many complaints in Maine's lawsuit against Gentle Wind focus on the promotion of their healing instruments, hand-held objects such as brightly colored, laminated cards or plastic pucks bearing designs the group has created.

Gentle Wind's website, [www.gentlewindproject.org](http://www.gentlewindproject.org), still showcases the instruments. They have been available to the public for requested donations, which can exceed \$1,500. The group also makes them available to trauma victims without cost.

The state alleges in court documents that Gentle Wind falsely claimed medical studies proved the instruments are effective. One of the allegations is that the group instead disbursed more than \$500,000 in so-called medical grants to patients who were asked to use and advocate for the instruments.

If the state prevails, the suit permanently could prevent Gentle Wind's officers from running any other nonprofit in the state and ban them from using the Gentle Wind Project name, said Charles Dow, a spokesman for the Maine Attorney General's Office.

"We're trying to put them out of business," he said. "And we want restitution for the people who have been taken."

Consumer complaints prompted a three-year investigation that led to the case, he said.

The state argues that any income generated from the instruments should not be classified as donations, but instead should be revenue subject to state sales taxes. The attorney general has asked a judge to order Gentle Wind to pay back sales taxes to the state.

The attorney general also argues that Gentle Wind should reimburse any consumer who bought a healing instrument from 2000 to the present if that consumer files a claim.

The attorney general is asking for a fine of up to \$10,000 for each intentional unfair trade act violation.

The suit names Gentle Wind's board of directors, Joan Carreiro, Pamela Ranheim and Mary, John, Carol and Shelbourne Miller, as defendants. The Millers are not all related.

Mary Miller said she has been advised by a lawyer not to comment during the legal proceedings and she did not provide information about their legal representation in this case. But she said in a January interview with Foster's that the healing instruments never have been sold and are free to anyone who needs one.

Dr. Robert Lang of Connecticut cites that factor in support of Gentle Wind. Lang has a private medical practice with locations in Hamden and Madison, Conn. He specializes in endocrinology, rheumatology and naturopathic medicine.

"I thought they were doing a very honorable thing," he said.

Lang, also an associate professor at Yale University's School of Nursing, said he offers the healing instruments to his patients and has several who ask to use them each time they have an appointment.

"My experience with the instruments is that they do help people," he said. "... enough people that I don't believe it's a placebo."

He said people gain a feeling of well-being and calm when they use the instruments, with people suffering from stress benefitting most.

He is quoted on Gentle Wind's website. He said he has never received any money from the group, but has gotten some of the instruments for free.

The state also has leveled allegations against Gentle Wind based on the way the directors may have spent money from donations.

Maine is alleging a misapplication of charitable funds to buy personal property such as a boat, motorcycles, electronics and musical instruments. The purchase of these items are documented in tax filings.

The state argues the defendants should pay a civil penalty equal to the value of any

property they received from Gentle Wind for private use.

The board of directors lives in a four-bedroom Durham, N.H., residence. The state alleges donations improperly paid for it as well as properties in Kittery and Melbourne Beach, Fla.

All properties but the Durham residence since have been sold. Judy Garvey, who maintains with her husband the website Wind of Changes, says the Kittery property was sold to members of the organization and is back on the market. The Durham residence is on the market for \$975,000, reduced from \$1.25 million.

The suit seeks to force Gentle Wind to stop selling any real estate or personal property.

The group, through a posting on the Craig's List website, is also selling shop equipment. This includes machinery that Garvey says was used to make the healing instruments. The advertisement's phone number reaches the Durham residence.

Maine's lawsuit also alleges that additional funds went directly to officers, including a \$70,270 salary for John Miller listed in Gentle Wind's most recent tax filing.

The state alleges that Gentle Wind funds were loaned to a relative, reportedly for medical care, without a timely plan for reimbursement.

Gentle Wind's tax form for the tax year beginning September 2003 and ending August 2004 reported net assets of more than \$1.3 million.

The nonprofit also has been registered in New Hampshire since 1999. An affiliated group, Allies for Trauma Relief, registered in the state with a Canterbury address last year.