



Jefferson Parish Council announces emergency changes to ordinances used to punish pro-lifers

ADF lawsuit motivates council to acknowledge unconstitutional ordinances just days before court hearing

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ADF Media Relations | 480-444-0020

JEFFERSON PARISH, LA — Just two days before a federal court hearing in which Jefferson Parish ordinances governing noise and public gatherings would be challenged, the council called on a rarely used emergency procedure to approve changes to the ordinances. Parish officials used the ordinances earlier this year to harass speakers at a pro-life event.

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"We asked them to make these changes months ago, but the council's negative response at the time left our clients no choice but to file a lawsuit," said Michael Johnson, an attorney with the Alliance Defense Fund based in Shreveport, Louisiana. "Although the council now recognizes that the existing ordinances are blatantly unconstitutional, our clients suffered discrimination and the court must remedy that."

One of the ordinances used to squelch pro-life speech in Jefferson Parish is known as the "circus ordinance." ADF filed *Shanks v. Jefferson Parish* on April 14. The plaintiffs had asked the court to stop parish officials from enforcing the unconstitutional ordinances.

Although the council may have amended its ordinances, the case will go forward in the coming weeks because of the harm suffered by the Rev. Bill Shanks and other pro-lifers who tried to speak out. "Our first choice is to solve problems without litigation," Johnson said, "but in cases like this one, the pro-life leaders need legal representation and we are glad to help."

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