

AUGUST 2024

ANNUNCIATION HOUSE NEWSLETTER

¡GRACIAS!

Thank you to our community near and far—former volunteers and community members, elected officials, faith leaders and congregations, non-profit and legal advocacy organizations, and more—for the outpouring of solidarity with Annunciation House in recent months as we faced unprecedented litigation from the Texas Attorney General.

Founded in 1978, Annunciation House began as a humble convening of individuals united by a desire to experience the Gospel more deeply. For 46 years we have carried on this tradition. Our vision for welcoming the refugee and living solidarity with the poor has been confronted with challenges over this time, but it has also been a source of hope, joy, and determination. Despite recent challenges to our mission and work, we remain centered on accompanying the poor in migration and bearing witness to their struggle.

Attorney General's attack on Annunciation House is part of a larger context of efforts to dismantle asylum, separate families, and criminalize migrants, as well as those who would aid them. We urgently need all voices to speak out for the most vulnerable among us. By acting in solidarity and holding onto faith, change is possible. ¡Si se puede!

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Timeline of Recent Litigation

In February 2024, the Attorney General of Texas initiated litigation against Annunciation House and threatened to revoke our license to operate in the state of Texas. This litigation is ongoing. Below is an abbreviated timeline of events:

Feb. 7 2024

Without warning, representatives from Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton's Office came to Annunciation House's door with a Request to Examine (RTE). They demanded to enter Annunciation House and examine a broad swath business records under Texas Business and Organization § 12.152. Annunciation House denied the representatives entry and access to our records. Annunciation House requested 30 days to respond to the Request to Examine, but the Attorney General's Office said that Annunciation House would only be given 24 hours to turn over the requested records.

Feb. 8 2024

Annunciation House sought a court determination as to what documents the Attorney General's Office could legally access. We were granted a temporary restraining order (TRO) against the Attorney General to allow time for review.

Feb. 16 2024

The Texas Attorney General filed a lengthy counterclaim accusing Annunciation House for the first time of operating a "stash house" and engaging in human smuggling. The counterclaim revealed that the purpose of the Request to Examine was to investigate Annunciation House for these alleged activities. The Attorney General sought to revoke Annunciation House's license to operate in Texas on the basis of our refusal to immediately comply with the RTE.

Feb. 23 2024

Annunciation House held a press conference addressing the pending litigation, joined by allies including U.S. Rep. Veronica Escobar, TX Rep. Joe Moody, El Paso County Judge Ricardo Samaniego, El Paso Mayor Oscar Leeser and faith leaders from the Catholic Diocese of El Paso and Temple Mount Sinai.

Mar 7 2024

The first hearing took place in the Texas Attorney General's lawsuit against Annunciation House at the 205th District Court, overseen by Judge Francisco Dominguez. Annunciation House Director Ruben Garcia testified at the hearing.

Mar. 11 2024

Judge Francisco Dominguez issued an order in favor of Annunciation House, blocking the Texas Attorney General's subpoena. Judge Dominguez noted that the "efforts to run roughshod over Annunciation House, without regard to due process or fair play, call into question the true motivation for the Attorney General's attempt to prevent Annunciation House from providing the humanitarian and social services that it provides." Judge Dominguez further stated that "there is a real and credible concern that the attempt to prevent Annunciation House from conducting business in Texas was predetermined."

May 8 2024

The Texas Attorney General filed for a temporary injunction in response to Judge Dominguez's decision. The Attorney General renewed its request that Annunciation House be enjoined (stopped) from operating during the pendency of the litigation, and reiterated the allegations that Annunciation House is operating a "stash house" and engaged in illegal activity. Annunciation House filed a response on May 24, 2024.

Jun. 17 2024

The second hearing in the litigation took place at the 205th District Court, once again before Judge Francisco Dominguez. The Attorney General called for Annunciation House to be shut down. Jerry Wesevich, counsel for Annunciation House, responded that the Attorney General's claims were "utter nonsense" and requested injunctive relief protecting Annunciation House from future unreasonable records requests.

Jul 2 2024

Judge Francisco Dominguez issued a second ruling in favor of Annunciation House granting summary judgment and issuing all injunctive and declaratory relief requested by Annunciation House, including:

- A finding that the administrative subpoena served on Annunciation House is void and unenforceable;
- A finding that the Texas Attorney General did not follow the procedures required under the Fourth Amendment for administrative subpoenas; and
- A finding that Annunciation House is entitled to declaratory relief protecting it from future harassment and overreaching from the Texas Attorney General

"The record before this Court makes clear that the Texas Attorney General's use of the request to examine documents from Annunciation House was a pretext to justify its harassment of Annunciation House employees and the persons seeking refuge.

"This Court previously expressed its concern that the Attorney General did not identify what laws he believed were being violated from the outset. In fact, the record before the Court now establishes that the Attorney General was seeking evidence of alleged criminal activity all along. This is outrageous and intolerable."

- Judge Francisco Dominguez, 205th District Court, July 2, 2024

Jul 15 2024

The Texas Attorney General announced that it will appeal Judge Dominguez's latest ruling.

The Annunciation House Board of Directors extends its utmost gratitude to our legal team, including Jerry Wesevich, Peter McGraw, and Amy Warr, for their advocacy and guidance throughout this matter..

Press Releases and Statements of Support

We are grateful for the hundreds of allies who have expressed their support for Annunciation House in recent weeks, and for journalists who have amplified this issue and considered its ramifications beyond Annunciation House alone.

Below is a selection of recent journalism and statements of support on the litigation:

PRESS RELEASES

- [Texas Attorney General Press Release, announcing lawsuit against Annunciation House, February 21, 2024](#)
- [Annunciation House Press Release, February 21, 2024](#)
- [Annunciation House Press Conference, February 23, 2024](#)

Excerpt of statement from Ruben Garcia, Feb 23 Press Conference:

"Why are we here? What brings us together this morning isn't a discussion of country conditions that push people to flee their country. This is not a discussion about what immigration policy should be.. This is not about electioneering; this is not about one candidate or another. **What this is about is human beings who have arrived, who are now in front of us, that are now in our community. And the question arises: how do we respond to these human beings?**

.For over 46 years, we have been welcoming the refugee across political administrations and moments and officers. People have continued to knock on our door, and we have been opening that door and providing hospitality. The numbers are now in the hundreds of thousands over that 46-year history. We have been so fortunate to be able to elicit faith communities in El Paso and New Mexico—and outside of El Paso—who have also stepped forward and said, "what we are called to do is welcome the refugee." We're talking about very basic things: to give them to places to sleep, food to eat, places to shower and clean up, assist them in making contact with their families who can receive them.

Since 2014, we have welcomed tens of thousands of refugees that Border Patrol, ICE, and the Department of Homeland Security processed and had to release *with no place to release them*. They asked us, and the coalition of faith communities, if we would receive them. We have been doing this at a time of great press coverage regarding the hundreds, and even thousands, of families who found themselves on the street surrounding Sacred Heart Church when temperatures got very cold.

This is what this moment is about, and there are individuals who have decided that this should be illegal. I personally am taken aback by the use of words like "smuggling" to call our houses of hospitality "stash houses." **Is there no shame to refer to houses of God—houses of hospitality—as stash houses?**

And so we gather now to begin the effort of responding to the intention to close down houses of hospitality, beginning with Annunciation House. It is a forewarning to other entities that also do the work of hospitality, that they can very well be next."

STATEMENTS OF SUPPORT

- U.S. Representative Veronica Escobar (D-El Paso), Feb. 21, 2024

"The accusations being made by Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton are outrageous, and the tactics being employed... are reminiscent of the abuses of power employed during some of the darkest periods in American History." -U.S. Rep. Veronica Escobar

- Bishop Mark J. Seitz, Catholic Diocese of El Paso, Feb. 22, 2024

"We are now witnessing an escalating campaign of intimidation, fear, and dehumanization in the State of Texas, one characterized by barbed wire, harsh new laws penalizing the act of seeking safety at our border, and the targeting of those who would offer aid as a response of faith." -Bishop Mark Seitz

- Texas Catholic Conference of Bishops, Feb 23, 2024

- Maryknoll Joint Leadership Statement, Feb 23, 2024

"We see on the U.S.-Mexico border decades of neglect by the U.S. government to provide a safe, orderly and humane migration process, and now increasingly aggressive responses by the state of Texas that not only punish migrants for the simple act of seeking safety but also target those who offer aid as a response of faith." -Maryknoll Joint Leadership

- Catholic Volunteer Network, Feb 23, 2024

- 150+ Organizations Stand in Solidarity with Annunciation House and Denounce Texas' Attacks on Humanitarian Aid, February 26, 2024

- California Catholic Conference of Bishops Executive Committee, February 27, 2024

"For the AG to claim the nonprofit is responsible for 'worsening illegal immigration' shows a lack of fundamental understanding of the gravity of immigration as a humanitarian concern and unjustly attacks a long-standing partner in relief efforts." -California Catholic Conference of Bishops Executive Committee

- Interfaith Immigration Coalition: 430+ Faith Groups and Leaders Express Solidarity with Annunciation House, March 4, 2024

"AG Paxton's decision to target Annunciation House through legal actions - with the ultimate goal of shutting it down - is designed to intimidate other faith-based and secular organizations that provide essential humanitarian services to people seeking safety in Texas." -Interfaith Immigration Coalition

- Evangelical Lutheran Church of America (ELCA) Conference of Bishops, March 4, 2024

"We call on policymakers to prioritize the protection and care of migrants, especially children and families, and to work toward humane and just solutions to address the root causes of migration. As people of faith, we are called to welcome the stranger and to love our neighbor as ourselves." -ECLA Conference of Bishops

- Ohio Province of the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur, March 6, 2024

- National Nurses United, March 18, 2024

Recent Press Coverage & Editorials

Keep reading for more analysis of what the Texas Attorney General's litigation means for immigrant rights, as well as how it could impact other shelters, churches, and non-profits that advocate for marginalized communities

[Annunciation House warns Texas AG could target other NGOs for migrant aid](#), El Paso Matters, February 23, 2024

[El Paso's Saint of the Border Negotiates a New Reality](#), The New Yorker, February 23, 2024

[I've volunteered at Annunciation House. The Texas attorney general is plain wrong](#), National Catholic Reporter, February 28, 2024

[Judge suggests Paxton has "ulterior political motives" in Annunciation House case](#), El Paso Matters, March 7, 2024

[Ken Paxton Mistakes Catholic Teachings for "Bohemian Commandments"](#), Texas Monthly, May 9, 2024

[El Paso judge blocks Texas AG Ken Paxton's effort to close Annunciation House](#), El Paso Matters, March 11, 2024

[Are Catholic nonprofits really to blame for the migrant crisis at the border?](#), America Magazine, May 14, 2024

[Pope Francis denounces attempts to close southern border as 'madness'](#), The Hill, May 19, 2024

[Investigations: How Ken Paxton is stretching the boundaries of consumer protection laws to pursue political targets](#), The Texas Tribune, May 30, 2024

[Faith-Based Groups That Assist Migrants Become Targets of Extremists](#), The New York Times, June 2, 2024

[This Catholic leader shelters migrants. Texas says he runs 'stash houses.'](#) The Washington Post, June 6, 2024

[El Paso judge rejects Ken Paxton's 'outrageous and intolerable' efforts to shut down Annunciation House shelters](#), El Paso Matters, July 2, 2024

[How Texas is still investigating migrant aid groups on the border after a judge's scathing order](#), Associated Press, July 5, 2024

Grounded in Good News

Fr. Bill Morton, SSC

The first few times I celebrated the Eucharist with the Annunciation House Volunteer community I was surprised that the Gospel was always Matthew 25:35. Knowing that Ruben didn't waste words I realized that he uses it because we still haven't heard the message! Why go on to the next thing when you still don't grasp the first thing? The message of Matthew is the heart of the Gospel and the ultimate criteria for being an authentic follower of Jesus; an authentic human being: I was in need, and you responded or not. Period. I was a stranger and you welcomed me. Or not. I was hungry and you fed me. Or not. Every religious practice or expression of faith finds its meaning to the degree it empowers me to love my neighbor. Why?

Because Jesus reveals in this command a mystery more profound than the Holy Trinity: We are created in God's image and likeness and are, therefore, brothers and sisters, all of the same family and responsible for one another. To behave otherwise is to commit the sin of Cain who when asked by God, Where is your brother?, pronounces the great denial rooted in guilt, "Am I my brother's keeper?". "Yes. Where is he?".

If, as Les Miserable says: "To love another person is to see the face of God", then to serve another person is to serve God and to welcome and break bread with God, to "convivir" with the very source of our existence.

Love of neighbor and welcoming the stranger is not one task among others but rather the purpose for which we exist and the path to human fulfillment, happiness and meaning, the creation of community, a new humanity, the restoration of our planet, a new world. Our failure to obey this universal command of our Creator is what has led to such global injustice, war, conflict, hatred, corruption and the very destruction of our Common Home.

But it is not too late. We can begin anew to listen to and put into practice Matthew 25. Change is costly, painful, risky, but liberating. Our encounters with the migrant, the refugee, will reveal painful truths about my lifestyle, values, faith and the cost of what makes me comfortable and secure.

Love of neighbor, especially of the most vulnerable, is not one path among others. It is the only way that leads to genuine freedom, joy and peace, because it is the only way we can create authentic community in which we live as brothers and sisters, in accord with the design of our Creator, finding our purpose and putting all else in perspective.

Until I “get” Matthew 25, I am simply lost. Once I grasp it I am truly found. Another light comes on in the world. The new creation is at hand.



Photo by Cynthia Gonzalez, Feb. 2, 2024

Support Our Work

Annunciation House could not run without the generosity of our community, near and far. Our houses are sustained totally by the spontaneous and free contributions of individuals, groups and faith communities.

Volunteer

Annunciation House is run by volunteers who commit to an experience of transformative service and solidarity. Some of our volunteers are local community members, while others come for a time to both live and work in our houses of hospitality. Volunteers form a close-knit community: besides the common ground of living and working together, they meet every morning for reflection; take time off together each month to relax and have fun; and often form friendships that last for life.

Annunciation House is eagerly seeking long-term (one year or more) and short-term (two weeks or more) volunteers to assist with providing hospitality to migrants and refugees in El Paso, TX. We welcome both local volunteers from El Paso/Juarez/Las Cruces, and out-of-towners who can commit to at least two weeks. Please visit our [website](#) for more information!

Donate

At this time, we primarily request monetary donations. Unrestricted monetary donations enable Annunciation House to respond quickly and nimbly to ever-changing needs at the border, purchase the supplies our guests need the most, and limit waste.

Annunciation House is a 501(c)3 organization; all donations are tax-deductible. Financial donations can be made online with a credit card through [this PayPal site](#). Checks made out to Annunciation House can be mailed to:

Annunciation House
P.O. Box 11189
El Paso, TX 79995-1189



ANNUNCIATION HOUSE

www.annunciationhouse.org