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#WelcomeWithDignity Denounces Texas Attorney General Paxton's Lawsuit Against Catholic Charity

"Attorney General Paxton has reached a new low in targeting a volunteer-based religious nonprofit providing food, shelter and aid to asylum seekers. The federal government must intervene."

Washington, DC – Immigration and asylum experts from the [#WelcomeWithDignity Campaign](#) Friday strongly denounced Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton's lawsuit against Annunciation House, a volunteer-based Catholic non-governmental organization that has been helping migrants in El Paso, Texas, for 46 years, and his claims that the organization's license must be revoked for "aiding illegal immigration."

Groups like Annunciation House are doing vital work to support and provide aid to some of the most vulnerable people in our communities, filling a gap left by a broken immigration system and increasingly inhumane actions by our political leaders.

The lawsuit comes as Texas' latest "smuggling" law, Senate Bill 4 from the third special session, was [enacted](#) on February 6, and ahead of Senate Bill 4 from the fourth special session, Texas' latest deportation and racial profiling law, goes into effect on March 5.

It is the latest move in Texas' senseless Operation Lone Star and campaign against humanitarian assistance groups. Paxton's allegations that the group is "aiding illegal immigration" and operating an "illegal stash house" are inaccurate and egregious. Annunciation House offers "hospitality to migrants, immigrants and refugees," providing a haven to the most vulnerable and a warm welcome to newcomers, in line with our values as Americans. Under the flimsy guise of "preventing human smuggling," the state of Texas is using the law to intimidate organizations that are meeting basic human needs and responding to the true issue at our border: desperate people seeking safety.

We call upon the Biden Administration to challenge the entirety of Operation Lone Star in court, and make a stand for America's true values.

“Attorney General Paxton has reached a new low in targeting a volunteer-based religious nonprofit providing food and shelter to asylum seekers,” said **Melina Roche, #WelcomeWithDignity campaign manager**. “These attacks on people of color, religious institutions and organizations supporting immigrants, migrants and refugees are un-American. The federal government must intervene with this lawsuit. We stand in solidarity with Annunciation House, and all organizations across both Texas and the rest of the country that are supporting people seeking asylum and welcoming them with dignity.”

“Ken Paxton’s attack against Annunciation House is an attack on our borderland way of life, how we welcome the stranger and feed the hungry regardless of immigration status. For over 46 years, Annunciation House has shown, through tireless leadership, how welcoming migrants and asylum seekers is possible and is our best response. Las Americas is proud to be directly born out of this vision of welcoming,” said **Marisa Limón Garza, Executive Director of Las Americas Immigrant Advocacy Center in El Paso, Texas, and Ciudad Juárez, Mexico, and New Mexico**. “We condemn this heinous assault by Ken Paxton and stand in solidarity with the staff, volunteers, board, guests, and community of Annunciation House. We urge elected officials, advocates, and allies to denounce Texas’ efforts to undermine the organizations and communities doing the work of welcome.”

“Many Catholic sisters, including several in my own Franciscan community, have served in Annunciation House, welcoming vulnerable people seeking safety in this country,” said **Sr. Marie Lucey, OSF, associate director of Franciscan Action Network**. “AG Ken Paxton identifies as Christian, and Governor Greg Abbott calls himself a Catholic. Their outrageous, heartless behavior is a far cry from the teachings of Jesus and are contrary to Catholic Social Teaching. The humanitarian service offered by Annunciation House and by other faith organizations must be allowed to continue without harassment from the state of Texas.”

“As Christians, we are called to love our neighbor and welcome the stranger – yet by attacking the compassionate love that Annunciation House offers, Attorney General Ken Paxton is doing the exact opposite,” said **the Rev. Nathan Empsall, executive director of Faithful America**. “Like Governor Abbott, Paxton is only escalating an already deadly situation to score political points. He is also twisting our shared Christian faith beyond recognition and proving himself to be a cynical hypocrite when it comes to 'religious freedom' by targeting the good work of Annunciation House. Faithful America's 200,000 members stand with Annunciation House and with all Texans who come together to care for migrants in need – showing compassion; offering food, clothing, and shelter; and advocating for an end to Abbot's cruel and illegal Operation Lone Star.”

“The Texas attorney general’s recent lawsuit against Annunciation House targets people of faith, a collective of staff and volunteers, a non-governmental organization in El Paso, that seeks to welcome the stranger in the local community. This is an attack on religious liberty, whether intentional or not,” said **Pablo DeJesús, executive director of Unitarian Universalists for Social Justice**. “This sets a dangerous precedent. This is a slippery slope of the worst kind. We are forced to ask who might be next? Unitarian Universalists oppose targeting civil society participants for their good works in the community, providing services to populations and communities in need. We are not a casual faith. We have a long tradition of providing community care and humanitarian assistance. As people of faith, deeply committed to putting our faith into action, we are profoundly concerned for the implications of this lawsuit.”

“Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton's lawsuit against Annunciation House is immoral and shameful. This action criminalizes human rights defenders,” said **Geronimo Ramirez (Maya Ixil), Executive Director of Comunidad SOL Ohio**. “Comunidad SOL denounces this action by Ken Paxton. We demand that the American government adhere to the principles and values of human rights, and we stand in solidarity with Annunciation House.”

“Ken Paxton’s latest attack against Annunciation House in El Paso shows that there are no limits to his immoral campaign against vulnerable asylum-seekers at the border,” said **Dani Marrero Hi, deputy director of La Unión del Pueblo Entero (LUPE)**. “Annunciation House and dozens of other groups from El Paso to Eagle Pass and Brownsville do the daily hard work of welcoming immigrant families with shelter, a warm meal and clean clothes, among other basic necessities every human being deserves. Contrary to what Paxton is alleging, what is happening at the border is a direct result of failing immigration policies that emphasize deterrence and military tactics over upholding human and civil rights to protect people seeking safety at our nation’s doorstep. Paxton, Gov. Greg Abbott and other state leaders should follow the lead of Annunciation House and humanitarian groups instead of trying to shut them down.”

“The Texas attorney general’s lawsuit targets Annunciation House but it is also about all of us, people of faith, responding to the needs of vulnerable people seeking safety,” said **Susan Gunn, director of the Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns**. “This is an attack on religious liberty and if the attorney general succeeds, it will set a dangerous precedent against anyone who puts their faith in action by welcoming the stranger as Jesus taught us. But the fact is federal, state and local governments depend on faith-based organizations like Annunciation House, to feed, clothe and shelter people whom government agencies have processed and released. Annunciation House exemplifies our Christian commitment to love one another, and makes our society stronger.”

“Ken Paxton's callous and baseless attack against Annunciation House's model of service and compassion is morally unacceptable and frankly disgusting. At a time when our immigration and

asylum system is broken, places of safety like the Annunciation House provide indispensable and critical care to the most vulnerable,” said **Mario Carrillo, Austin-based campaigns director at America’s Voice**. “As an immigrant who was welcomed by El Paso more than 30 years ago, I find it heartbreaking, though not surprising, to see our state attack shelters that are simply seeking to welcome people with dignity. We urge Democratic leadership and the Biden administration to condemn this targeting and attempt to criminalize this remarkable faith-based non-governmental organization's public service and humanitarian response.”

“As we have seen firsthand, Annunciation House ensures that asylum seekers released by Border Patrol – who are in the United States legally – do not end up on the city's streets, and can make arrangements to move on to their U.S. destinations. It is a vital service carried out with utmost faith and compassion,” affirmed **Maureen Meyer, vice president of programs at the Washington Office on Latin America**. “Federal agencies and municipal authorities understand the role that Annunciation House plays, and they coordinate closely with it. At the state level, though, politicians with a dark, inhumane agenda are on the attack. They must not get away with it: If they do, we'll feel the consequences well beyond El Paso.”

“These allegations from the Texas Attorney General show that Texas leadership won’t stop at criminalizing people seeking safety at the U.S.-Mexico border, but the organizations that work to provide life-saving services and defend their human rights as well,” said **Samantha Ruvalcaba, communications coordinator at the National Immigrant Justice Center**. “We denounce this action against the Annunciation House and urge others to defend the organizations that work hard to mend the human rights crisis at the border created by Texas leadership’s anti-immigrant policies.”

“The actions of the Texas attorney general are disgraceful,” said **Dylan Corbett, executive director of the Hope Border Institute**. “Faith-based organizations have been picking up the pieces of a broken system for decades, and Paxton’s lawsuit is designed for political effect and also to have a chilling effect. We demand that the state of Texas end its campaign of intimidation against people of faith and aid workers and stop using migrants and believers as pawns in political games.”

“Groups like Annunciation House represent the best of this country,” said **Kate Jastram, director of policy and advocacy at the Center for Gender & Refugee Studies (CGRS)**. “Its compassion and service should be commended, not criminalized. We stand in solidarity with Annunciation House and decry the state of Texas’ shameful attacks on volunteers, faith groups and community organizations stepping up to welcome people seeking safety. We urge the Biden administration to intervene in this lawsuit and protect organizations serving refugees and immigrants from intimidation, retaliation, and political attacks.”

“Lawyers for Good Government (L4GG) denounces the shameful actions of the Texas attorney general in targeting Annunciation House, an organization committed to providing sanctuary and

support to migrants,” said **Priscilla Orta, director of L4GG’s Project Corazon**. “This lawsuit not only threatens the vital work of Annunciation House but also undermines our shared values of compassion and human dignity. We stand shoulder to shoulder with our fellow advocates, reaffirming our unwavering support for asylum seekers and other immigrants and condemning any attempt to criminalize humanitarian aid.”

"The Florence Project stands fully with Annunciation House and all humanitarian reception sites in Texas and across the U.S.," said **Laura St. John, Florence Project legal director**. "Annunciation House has long done vital work in ensuring that people seeking protection in the United States are welcomed to the country with humanity and dignity by providing food and shelter to those who need it. Attacking organizations who are upholding American values of welcoming those in need of safety and protecting human rights is abhorrent. The truth is that governments at all levels rely on Annunciation House and other similar organizations to shelter and support people that immigration authorities have processed and released, ensuring that they are not left on the streets. Their work is critical to the migrants they serve and to our communities as a whole. We should be applauding and investing further in reception service providers like Annunciation House, not trying to intimidate them and shut them down. We call on leaders in Texas and throughout the country to follow the lead of reception service providers and focus on solutions that meet migrants with dignity and humanity rather than threats and deterrence."

“Attorney General Paxton choosing to go after the most vulnerable individuals and to attack historical institutions is a crass overstep that goes against the spirit of his office,” said **Kim Haynes, regional director of programs, Southwest, at Church World Service**. “Organizations like Annunciation House serve the most vulnerable and live out our moral call to welcome the sojourner – while filling the gaps within our communities by providing basic needs of food, water and shelter. These are the helpers in our communities, and they are stepping up to protect human dignity. Our national, state and local leaders should take this moment and boldly invest in community wholeness and our capacity to welcome newcomers with care, kindness and compassion. Texas can and should do better by them.”

“Annunciation House has supported countless migrants and people seeking asylum and deserve our heartfelt thanks and support in their vital mission, not to be targeted with politically motivated legal stunts,” said **Robyn Barnard, senior director of refugee advocacy, Human Rights First**. “We hope that the State of Texas will see sense and drop this baseless suit, or that the Biden administration will intervene to ensure this important institution is protected and able to continue in its service to those in need. We stand firmly with Annunciation House.”

“Annunciation House should be celebrated for the compassionate, thoughtful and tireless work it does every day to welcome people legally seeking asylum in the United States,” said **Katharina**

Obser, director of the Migrant Rights and Justice program at the Women’s Refugee Commission.

“Any attempt to target them for this work is shameful and must stop immediately. At a time of record global displacement, providing reception that supports people with finding stability in the United States and navigating the immigration process, all while also ensuring less of a burden on local Customs and Border Protection (CBP) officials, should be viewed as a solution to resource and replicate. We stand with Annunciation House and all others engaged in the critical work of welcoming, and call on the administration to denounce the state of Texas’s attacks.”

“Texas’ action against Annunciation House is the latest example of Paxton and Abbott’s relentless campaign against immigrants and people of color,” said **Lisa Graybill, VP of law and policy at the National Immigration Law Center.** “Make no mistake, their goal is a Texas grounded in white supremacy, where a powerful few erode democracy by misusing government institutions and betraying the public trust. Authoritarianism has no place in this state or this country.”

“President Biden began digging his own party’s grave when he first failed to stop Governor Abbott and AG Paxton’s moves to thwart the roll-back of the Trump-era Migrant Protection Protocols, which didn’t protect anyone at all; then secondly failed to stand up to the immoral and clearly illegal Operation Lone Star,” said **Sarah Towle, Witness at the Border and author of the forthcoming book, Crossing the Line: Finding America in the Borderlands (June 2024).** “Texas’s latest attack – on those who offer welcome and succor to people in need per our national and religious values – is a slippery slope toward outlawing all efforts to see to the common good. If Annunciation House falls, so fall all volunteer-based nonprofits providing food, water, shelter, and aid to people in search of safety – a job they’ve had to do in the face of government inaction on the part of the world’s most vulnerable for more than forty years. This is truly a last chance for President Biden, and the Democratic Party more generally, to address immigration reform head-on, lean into human rights, and away from GOP extremism and cruelty for cruelty’s sake as their one-and-only immigration strategy.”

“We extend our full solidarity and unwavering support to Annunciation House. It’s infuriating anytime we see organizations targeted for simply providing much-needed support for people seeking safety and protection in our country,” said **Lee Williams, Chief Programs Officer at Global Refuge.** “Once again, Texas is turning its back on the value of compassion that marks our nation as a global humanitarian leader. We’ve seen Governor Abbott use cruel tactics against people seeking asylum throughout his tenure and his administration’s lawsuit shows that he will now look to score political points at the expense of organizations assisting this vulnerable population.”

The #WelcomeWithDignity Campaign for asylum rights is composed of more than 120 organizations committed to transforming the way the United States receives and protects people forced to flee their homes

to ensure they are treated humanely and fairly. To learn more and join our campaign visit:
welcomewithdignity.org

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