



Press Release
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Anchorage Law Firm Fights Charges Brought by Equal Rights Commission for Defending Women’s Homeless Shelter

Commission says attorney cannot talk about his client’s beliefs

Anchorage, AK—Attorneys with First Liberty Institute today filed a motion to dismiss before the Anchorage Equal Rights Commission (“AERC”) on behalf of the law firm Brena, Bell & Clarkson, P.C. in response to charges the AERC brought against it for defending the religious liberty of its client, a homeless shelter for women known as the Downtown Hope Center.

“No attorney should be discriminated against or harassed by the government for representing his client,” said Hiram Sasser, General Counsel to First Liberty. “These unelected bureaucrats overstepped their authority by issuing a complaint against the shelter. They’re now attempting to punish the shelter and its attorney for talking about this case. Can anyone but the AERC talk publicly about this case?”

Brena, Bell & Clarkson, P.C. attorney Kevin Clarkson represented the Downtown Hope Center (“DHC”), a religiously affiliated women’s homeless shelter, after the AERC accused it of violating Anchorage’s non-discrimination policy by preventing a biological male self-identifying as female from residing at the facility. As a religious organization, the DHC does not house biological men because doing so would traumatize and present unreasonable safety risks for many female residents who have experienced domestic violence or other forms of abuse. After local media outlets published stories about the case in which Mr. Clarkson discussed the AERC’s overreach and his defense of the DHC’s religious liberty, the Commission brought charges against his firm for violating local speech ordinances, forcing him to withdraw from representation.

On behalf of Brena, Bell & Clarkson, P.C., attorneys for First Liberty argue that the AERC is preventing an attorney from zealously advocating for his client by ignoring widely recognized protections for the attorney-client relationship, bringing charges against both DHC and its attorneys beyond its legal jurisdiction, and is violating the First Amendment rights of the attorney and client.

To read the motion to dismiss, click [here](#).

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About First Liberty Institute

[First Liberty Institute](#) is the largest legal organization in the nation dedicated exclusively to defending religious freedom for all Americans.

To arrange an interview, contact Lacey McNiel at media@firstliberty.org or by calling 972-941-4453.