

## **OurCalling, Local Church Ministering to Homeless, Asks City of Dallas for Religious Accommodation**

*City's interpretation of Inclement Weather Shelter Ordinance prevents OurCalling from fulfilling its mission*

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**Dallas, TX**—First Liberty Institute sent a letter today to the City of Dallas informing city officials that they are misinterpreting a city ordinance by requiring OurCalling, a local church and homeless ministry, to obtain a permit as a Temporary Inclement Weather Shelter (TIWS). However, the city also created a “buffer zone” that excludes OurCalling from participating in the TIWS program. The letter explains that putting OurCalling in a Catch-22 violates the Texas Religious Freedom Restoration Act (“TRFRA”) and asks the city for a religious accommodation to remove the threat to OurCalling’s ministry.

You can read the letter [here](#).

“OurCalling is fulfilling its calling to help people experiencing homelessness,” said Lea Patterson, Counsel for First Liberty Institute. “OurCalling deeply values its ongoing partnership with the City of Dallas in serving the homeless and is asking the city to do the right thing.”

OurCalling is a church and nonprofit ministry in Dallas that provides various homeless services. OurCalling partners closely with the Dallas Office of Homeless Solutions (“OHS”), as well as healthcare providers and other charities, including the North Texas Food Bank, the Salvation Army, Union Gospel Mission, the Bridge, the Stewpot, and others. During the historic February 2021 snowstorm, OurCalling staffed the Kay Bailey Hutchison Convention Center, providing shelter to over 1000 people.

Because of its religious beliefs, OurCalling remains open 24-hours as a last resort during emergencies if homeless individuals have nowhere else to go. Dallas ticketed OurCalling in 2018 for keeping its doors open during dangerous cold. Late last year, Dallas created a permitting program to allow churches like OurCalling to provide temporary shelter in inclement weather, but a downtown buffer zone excludes OurCalling from participating. OurCalling operates with the continued threat of receiving a ticket under an ordinance that could prevent it from fulfilling its mission.

Pastor Wayne Walker, OurCalling’s Executive Director said, “Our faith prevents us from closing our doors during emergencies, such as freezing weather, sending the people we serve out into the cold to risk frostbite, hypothermia, or even death while bidding them to ‘go in peace; keep warm and well fed.’”

According to the [City of Dallas](#), “Homelessness affects the entire Dallas community, not just the persons who experience homelessness over the course of the year. More than 300,000 Dallas residents live in poverty and almost 600,000 live in housing distressed households. Of the 2,000 beds in Dallas shelters, the majority are full every night.” This year, because of COVID-19 limitations, Dallas shelters are hundreds of beds short.

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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.

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