News



A family of migrants is dropped off by a transport contractor for the U.S. Customs and Border Protection at a shelter run by Annunciation House in downtown El Paso, Texas, Dec. 13, 2022. A state judge blocked the Texas attorney general's demands for the records of Annunciation House March 11, 2024, citing concerns the state had a "predetermined" motive to shut down the Catholic nonprofit serving migrants. (OSV News/Reuters/Ivan Pierre Aguirre)

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A state judge March 11 temporarily blocked the Texas attorney general's demands for the records of Annunciation House, citing concerns the state had a "predetermined" motive to shut down the Catholic nonprofit serving migrants.

District Judge Francisco Dominguez in El Paso issued an order blocking Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton's subpoena of Annunciation House, indicating both that Paxton's effort seemed politically motivated and that it must go through appropriate due process in the state court system.

"The Attorney General's 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," Dominguez wrote. "There is a real and credible concern that the attempt to prevent Annunciation House from conducting business in Texas was predetermined."

Paxton in February filed suit in an attempt to shut down Annunciation House, accusing it of "human smuggling," in a move denounced by Catholic immigration advocates, including El Paso Bishop Mark J. Seitz.

Paxton's office did not immediately respond to a request for comment from OSV News.

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In a statement, Texas RioGrande Legal Aid, which is representing Annunciation House, said the court decided "that an orderly process would be followed to decide what documents are due to the Attorney General under law, and the Attorney General would not be able to enforce his subpoena without court oversight."

Jerome Wesevich, TRLA lead counsel on the case, said, "We're very pleased with the Court's ruling regarding Annunciation House."

"The Court demands that standard civil procedures be followed, which will mean a fair and orderly process for determining what documents the law allows the Attorney General to see," he said. "Annunciation House needs to collect sensitive information, including health information, concerning its guests, and it is imperative for the safety and well-being of the community that the releasing of this sensitive information be handled with care and the law in mind."

Ruben Garcia, director of Annunciation House, told reporters at a Feb. 23 press conference that the nonprofit has been providing basic resources like food, shelter and water to migrants and refugees who arrive at the border for nearly 50 years in consultation with the U.S. Border Patrol.

"There are individuals who have decided that that should be illegal," he said.

Annunciation House operates several shelters in the El Paso area, helping migrants and refugees with food, housing and other assistance, as well as providing information about how to fill out the required legal documents to claim asylum in the U.S.

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