

Ohio Court Rules City That Treated Pastor Like a Criminal Can't Discriminate Against Ministry

An Ohio pastor has won a three-year legal battle against the city of Bryan after it worked to shut down his ministry and even charged him with a crime for helping the homeless.

As CBN News has reported, the city attempted to close Pastor Chris Avell's church ministry due to alleged zoning violations. The Bryan City Zoning Commission claimed that since the church didn't have bedrooms, it could not house homeless people.

Avell's lawyer previously told CBN News Digital that once the pastor refused to close the doors of his church, the city began to engage in "unlawful harassment" by waging "lawfare."



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In one of several different legal battles with the city, Pastor Avell was fined and given a 60-day suspended jail sentence in 2025 for keeping Dad's Place Church open 24/7 for homeless people looking to escape the bitter cold.

Now, Judge James D. Bates of the Court of Common Pleas of Williams County has issued a final order dismissing with prejudice a lawsuit brought by city officials.

The court ruled Bryan's fire chief can't close the church site, declaring, "The City has given waivers to other businesses like hotels, but has refused to give the church a similar accommodation. This is fatal under strict scrutiny."

Therefore, a judgment in favor of Dad's Place must be entered."

The decision allows Dad's Place to operate its short-term shelter ministry free from interference by the city.

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