

# Vindication: Pastor Collects Financial Damages for Unlawful Arrest

Yesterday, exactly four years after his arrest, Pastor Stephen Joiner was awarded over \$10,000 in damages from the City of Columbus for his unlawful arrest during a pro-life demonstration.

On March 30, 2011, Pastor Joiner was arrested by Columbus Police Department Captain Frederick Shelton for simply holding a sign on a public right of way supporting the right to life of unborn children. As justification for his arrest of Pastor Joiner, Captain Shelton cited the City's parade ordinance, which required "groups" of even one individual to obtain a parade permit prior to engaging in speech on a public sidewalk. The police had also invoked the City's Handbill Ordinance against other pro-life demonstrators that day.

After a four-year battle in both state and federal courts, Liberty Counsel, in partnership with its close friend and local attorney Stephen Crampton, has vindicated the constitutional rights of Pastor Joiner and succeeded in enhancing the protection for free speech for all citizens in the City of Columbus.

The County Court for Lowndes County had previously dismissed all criminal charges against Pastor Joiner. Now, Pastor Joiner's civil suit has forced the City to pay a substantial sum of money in damages, to amend the two unconstitutional ordinances that were the subject of Pastor Joiner's lawsuit, and to pay all of Pastor Joiner's attorney's fees. After lengthy litigation, it was a solid victory for Pastor Joiner.

"The notion that one man can constitute a parade and that small groups of individuals need to seek permission and a

permit from the government before they can open their mouths on a public sidewalk is repugnant to the Constitution and undermines the foundation of this nation,” said Mat Staver, Founder and Chairman of Liberty Counsel. “Pastors are not only teachers and instructors, but are also responsible for protecting their congregation. We are proud to see pastors, like Pastor Joiner, stand up to defend the rights of their flock to speak out in the public arena,” Staver continued.

“This was a great victory for Pastor Joiner and for free speech in Mississippi,” said Daniel J. Schmid, Litigation Counsel for Liberty Counsel. “Pastor Joiner’s boldness in his stand for life is encouraging, and it is a privilege to be able to stand alongside pastors and fellow believers in defense of their right to stand for the most vulnerable among us,” Schmid said.

Liberty Counsel is an international nonprofit, litigation, education, and policy organization dedicated to advancing religious freedom, the sanctity of life, and the family since 1989, by providing pro bono assistance and representation on these and related topics.