



CITY OF BRYAN, OHIO

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Fire Safety Is Compelling Interest In Dad's Place Church Case, City of Bryan Emphasizes

BRYAN, Ohio, April 30, 2025 – Dad's Place church, in refusing to follow the Ohio Fire Code, is endangering the people who live in the apartments on the second floor, visitors, nearby businesses and first responders, the City of Bryan asserted in proceedings on Wednesday, April 30 before the 6th District Court of Appeals in Toledo.

"This case is not about religion or homelessness," attorney Marc Fishel, representing the city, told the court. "It is about public safety and, more specifically, fire safety. Fire safety is a compelling government interest."

The defendants include Dad's Place and Riehle Rentals, the landlord renting the first floor of 226 S. Main Street to the church.

Despite forceful and clear rulings by the Court of Common Pleas of Williams County, Ohio, and similar rulings by the U.S. District Court for the Northern District of Ohio and the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Sixth Circuit, the dangerous situation involving Dad's Place church has persisted for more than a year. The Ohio Attorney General's office surprisingly has argued against the City's attempts to enforce the Ohio Fire Code. The AG's office has continued to pursue this claim even though the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Sixth Circuit ruled that Dad's Place would not likely succeed on the merits of its free exercise claims under the U.S. and Ohio Constitutions. The Williams County Common Pleas Court has previously noted: "The City of Bryan's enforcement of the fire code and zoning regulations do not require Dad's Place to violate its worthwhile and necessary religious beliefs to 'serve' others. It merely requires Dad's Place to do so safely to protect the citizens it serves, their neighbors and others using or living in any adjacent buildings or property."

As attorney Fishel explained, the two fire code issues involve a change of use occupancy from the current mercantile and assembly use to residential use and the required installation of a sprinkler system for residential use.

The City of Bryan and Fire Chief Douglas Pool cannot, under Ohio law, grant a change of use or an exception to the sprinkler requirement. Dad's Place is well aware that it can pursue these options through the appropriate state bodies – but the church thus far has refused to do so.

"If Dad's Place has sincerely held religious belief as they claim, it is surprising that they have not pursued the administrative remedies to potentially get the remedy they are seeking," Fishel said.

"Instead, Dad's Place simply argues they don't have to follow the Ohio Fire Code."

As Chief Pool has reported, there are no other comparable uses of property in Bryan that are told they don't need a sprinkler system. All others are following Ohio Fire Code sprinkler requirements.

"Dad's Place and Chief Pool don't get to select the most convenient or least expensive way to meet fire safety requirements," attorney Fishel noted. "A fire at Dad's Place would have devastating results for citizens of Bryan and the businesses in downtown Bryan."