

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

September 14, 2015

Contacts:

Kirsten Clanton, Southern Legal Counsel (352) 271-8890 (office); (561) 602-8010 (cell)  
Andrea Costello, Legal Advocacy Center of Central Florida (352) 246-5690 (cell)

**Couple Arrested by the City of Daytona Beach Files Lawsuit:  
Sharing Food With People in Need is Not a Crime**

**Daytona Beach, FL -- Today**, Southern Legal Counsel and the Legal Advocacy Center of Central Florida filed suit in the U.S. District Court for the Middle District of Florida against the City of Daytona Beach to challenge the City's ordinances and park rules which violate the constitutional rights of advocates that share food and assistance with homeless and hungry persons in public parks.

Clients in the case are the organization Spreading The Word Without Saying A Word ministry and its two founders, Gilbert Jimenez and Debbie Jimenez. The Plaintiffs received [considerable public attention](#) when they were arrested and trespassed from a City park in May 2014 for sharing food with homeless and hungry persons as an expression of their religious faith and beliefs.

Plaintiffs challenge the City's ordinances and park rules as violations of their First Amendment rights to religious expression and association and their right to due process. The Daytona Beach laws are part of a [national trend](#) by cities to criminalize food sharing and restrict the rights of advocates and homeless persons to be present in public spaces. Plaintiffs seek damages and an injunction against the City so they can resume their ministry in the City without fear of arrest.

Lead counsel, Kirsten Clanton, with Southern Legal Counsel, said "The City is prohibiting our clients from engaging in the innocent conduct of sharing food with another human being under threat of arrest. The City allows picnics, but not if homeless people have a place at the table. This is an attack on our clients' protected First Amendment rights to share food as an expression of their religious belief that they are communicating God's love by serving others in need."

Co-counsel Andrea Costello stated, "Rather than providing housing or services, the City is making a bad and unlawful decision to use its resources to arrest people who are providing aid to others. It's time that cities stop treating people who are just exercising their fundamental constitutional rights, and coming together to work for human rights in our communities, like criminals."

Gilbert and Debbie Jimenez stated, "Our ministry shares food with homeless and hungry people as an expression of our faith in Jesus Christ and belief that by serving those who are less fortunate, we are serving God and sharing God's love. We look forward to having our case heard in court so we can continue to carry out our mission."

A copy of the complaint is available [here](#).

#

*Southern Legal Counsel (SLC) is a nonprofit public interest law firm committed to the ideal of equal justice for all and the attainment of basic civil and human rights. It works to make this ideal a reality by providing legal representation to individuals and groups who would otherwise not have access to the justice system and whose cases may bring about systemic reform. SLC's Homeless Advocacy Project works statewide in Florida to protect and defend the civil and human rights of homeless persons and their advocates.*

*The Legal Advocacy Center of Central Florida (LACCF) is a non-profit public interest legal organization committed to impact litigation and advocacy for individuals and groups to advance economic, social and racial justice. LACCF pursues strategies that promote systemic change to further civil rights.*