

New Chicago Ordinance Targets 40 Days for Life, Tramples Pro-life Americans' Free Speech Rights

CHICAGO, Oct. 8 /Christian Newswire/ -- "You know a law is an improper intrusion on First Amendment rights when even the American Civil Liberties Union sides with pro-life interests in opposing certain aspects of a legislative action," said David Bereit, national director of 40 Days for Life. "Such is the case with the new bubble zone ordinance, approved Wednesday by Chicago's city council, which unconstitutionally restricts the peaceful activities of pro-life individuals on the sidewalk in front of abortion facilities in an attempt to cripple the ongoing 40 Days for Life prayer vigils."

The new city ordinance could not only block sidewalk counseling and the display of pro-life signs within 50 feet of all entrances to an abortion facility, but it could also prevent any pro-life person from being within eight feet of an abortion customer without getting that person's permission. Anyone found in violation could be fined up to \$500.

"This is a serious attack on free speech, and backers specifically cited 40 Days for Life in city council hearings as the reason for this measure," said Bereit. "We are asking anyone who loves free speech to call the office of Mayor Richard Daley and ask the mayor to please veto the bubble zone ordinance before it takes effect." The phone number for the Chicago mayor's office is 312-744-3300.

At the downtown Chicago Planned Parenthood location, for instance, this ordinance could completely block any 40 Days for Life vigil from the public right of way adjacent to the facility, due to sidewalks which make it virtually impossible for prayer vigil participants to be more than eight feet away from abortion customers without stepping into the busy street. Additionally, if someone were praying out loud, it could be interpreted as "education" or "counseling" and thus trigger the provisions of the ordinance.

Bereit said the biggest chilling effect is that "most pro-life Chicagoans will simply not know what they can or can't do without risk of a fine, and will thus be forced to stay far away from the abortion center or not come at all -- the abortion industry's desired effect. The bottom line is that if pro-life Americans don't push back, more situations like this will happen all across the country and our rights will be trampled on more and more by the abortion industry."

40 Days for Life (www.40daysforlife.com) is the largest and longest coordinated pro-life mobilization in history. The fall 40 Days for Life campaign is currently underway from September 23 -- November 1 in 212 cities across 45 American states, five Canadian provinces, and Denmark. The initiative consists of 40 days of intense prayer and fasting for an end to abortion, peaceful vigils outside abortion facilities, and grassroots community organizing.