

**NATIONAL LAWYERS GUILD
LOS ANGELES CHAPTER**

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PRESS RELEASE – FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**ADVOCATES FOR THE HOMELESS SUE SANTA MONICA;
ALSO DEFY NEW ANTI-HOMELESS ORDINANCE**

Today, the National Lawyers Guild filed a federal lawsuit on behalf of a number of charitable/religious/political providers of free food to the homeless and hungry in Santa Monica, California. The lawsuit challenges the legality of a new ordinance that seeks to outlaw outdoor meal programs and the distribution of food on public sidewalks. The effect of the ordinance would be to make it a crime for religious, charitable or political groups to publically provide free food to the poor in Santa Monica, as they have for decades. Today, the plaintiffs also began a campaign of openly defying the ordinance by distributing free food to the hungry on Santa Monica's Third Street Promenade.

James Lafferty, Executive Director of the National Lawyers Guild/Los Angeles Chapter, said, "I would hope that everyone who hears of this lawsuit will be shocked to learn that the age-old practice of providing for the hungry – a practice that is central to virtually all of the world's religions and humanitarian organizations – has now been criminalized by the City Council of Santa Monica. Santa Monica, to its everlasting shame, has made an immoral bargain with the devil. It has decided that its more important to shield its tourists and shoppers from having to gaze upon hungry residents lining up for food, than it is to provide enough food to shield its hungry residents from starvation."

Carol Sobel, President of the Los Angeles Chapter of the National Lawyers Guild and the attorney who filed the lawsuit, stated: “The real motivation behind Santa Monica’s ordinance is a desire to run its homeless residents out of town. Sadly, emboldened by Santa Monica’s new ordinance, some members of the Los Angeles City Council want to use the same kind of legal measures to clear the homeless out of downtown Los Angeles to make room for more commercial development. Well, Santa Monica’s effort is clearly illegal and just as we have challenged it in court, we are prepared to do the same with Los Angeles if it adopts a similar measure.”

Moira LaMountain, a plaintiff and one of the team leaders of HOPE (“Helping Other People Eat”), said she decided to join the lawsuit so that, “a decade-long tradition of providing food for the poor in Santa Monica could continue. So long as Santa Monica puts business rights before human rights and neglects its responsibility to its most vulnerable residents, private food programs like ours must continue to do all we can. It is a sad day when an act of charity becomes a crime.” Peggy Lee Kennedy, from Food Not Bombs, another of the plaintiffs, added that, “both Santa Monica and our federal government should re-think their priorities. Santa Monica should stop giving tax breaks to the City’s rich merchants, and the Bush Administration should increase the social services budget, not the already over-bloated Pentagon budget.”

To show support for those who feed the poor, Axis of Justice, a non-profit organization that brings musicians and music fans together to fight for social justice, provided funding for a special meal served in Palisades Park this morning. Tom Morello, guitarist for the band Audioslave and a founder of Axis of Justice, said “Feeding the homeless is not a crime. The real crime is that the members of the Santa Monica city council, all of whom have homes and plenty to eat, have passed a law making it illegal to help the poor. Axis of Justice is happy to provide meals for the needy in defiance of this unjust law.” Other groups involved in today's distribution of food include Children Helping Poor and Homeless People (CHPHP), Hand-to-Hand Hunger Project, and Food Not Bombs.

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