

Paxton sues to shut down faith-based migrant shelters

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AUSTIN (RNS)—Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton has sued a volunteer-run network of Catholic migrant shelters based in El Paso, aiming to revoke the organization's nonprofit registration.

The lawsuit comes after Annunciation House moved to delay handing over documents about its clients to the attorney general.



In this May 1, 2018, file photo, Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton speaks at a news conference in Austin. (Nick Wagner/Austin American-Statesman via AP, File)

Paxton's office said it had demanded Annunciation House records because of the organization's "potential efforts to facilitate illegal immigration."

"The Office of the Attorney General ("OAG") reviewed significant public record information strongly suggesting Annunciation House is engaged in legal violations such as facilitating illegal entry to the United States, alien

harboring, human smuggling, and operating a stash house,” the office wrote in [a Feb. 20 press release](#).

If Paxton is successful, Annunciation House—which was founded in 1976—could be required to cease sheltering migrants entering Texas. The lawsuit “seeks to revoke Annunciation House’s authorization to do business in Texas and asks the court to appoint a receiver to liquidate their assets,” Paxton’s office wrote.

On its [website](#), Annunciation House says it has hosted more than 500,000 migrants fleeing death squads, civil wars, human rights abuses and poverty.

“The Attorney General’s illegal, immoral and anti-faith position to shut down Annunciation House is unfounded,” Annunciation House said in its own press release. Paxton’s office “has stated that it considers it a crime for a Catholic organization to provide shelter to refugees,” the organization said.

According to reporting from the [Texas Tribune](#), the attorney general’s administrative subpoena sent to Annunciation House demanded it turn over records from January 2022 onward. Those records included identifying information about Annunciation House’s clients, referrals the nonprofit had made to legal services and their applications for federal funding for organizations that address hunger and homelessness.

One day to submit records

Annunciation House said the attorney general told the nonprofit on Feb. 7 it had one day to turn over records. After the state denied Annunciation House an extension, the organization responded by requesting that a U.S. district court rule on what documents it was required to turn over, and that it receive a restraining order granting more time to comply with Paxton’s

demands.

The statement from Paxton's office described the attempt to shut down Annunciation House as a "consequence" of the organization's legal actions and delays.

Paxton's legal action appears to be part of a broader Republican push to make immigration a key 2024 election campaign issue. In December 2022, four House Republicans, including two from Texas, sent a letter to Catholic Charities USA, a network of diocesan charity organizations, accusing it of "fueling" illegal immigration and violating federal law by providing necessities to migrants.

That same month, Texas Gov. Greg Abbott, a Catholic, called on Paxton to investigate El Paso nonprofits because they "may have assisted with illegal border crossings near El Paso."

Since then, Texas has escalated its anti-migrant actions. In January, its National Guard got into a standoff with federal agents in Eagle Pass after guard members and state troopers blocked the agents' access to the U.S. border. The same month, the U.S. Supreme Court ordered Texas to remove concertina wire from along the river erected to stop migrants from crossing.