



# NEWS RELEASE

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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### **COURT RULES IN FAVOR OF ST. CHARLES COUNTY IN FUNERAL LAW PROTEST CASE**

Members of the Westboro Baptist Church challenged ordinance prohibiting picketing one hour before or after at or near funerals in unincorporated county

**ST. CHARLES COUNTY, MO** - On Aug. 20, the United States District Court in St. Louis granted a motion dismissing a lawsuit filed by members of the Westboro Baptist Church, which challenged St. Charles County's ordinance prohibiting picketing one hour before or one hour after at or near funerals in unincorporated county.

Shirley Phelps-Roper and Megan Phelps-Roper, plaintiffs, claimed that enforcement of the ordinance violated their First Amendment free speech, religious liberty and assembly rights. They also claimed that the ordinance violates Missouri's Religious Freedom Restoration Act. According to the judgment, the plaintiffs assert that "they picket near certain funerals, including those of American soldiers, to publish their beliefs that God is punishing America for its failure to obey God's Word..."

The members of Westboro filed the lawsuit shortly after the ordinance was passed in Dec. 2010. The ordinance defines picketing at a funeral as "Protest activities engaged in by a person or persons located within three hundred (300) feet of the premises of a cemetery, mortuary, church or other place of worship or other location during, and which target, a funeral." Those who do not follow the ordinance will be charged with a misdemeanor. If convicted, the individual(s) will be charged with a maximum \$1,000 fine.

St. Charles County Councilman Joe Brazil was the original sponsor of the ordinance. "I think it is a great victory for us," said Brazil. "Families deserve privacy and the right to grieve the loss of their loved one without having hateful and disrespectful protest activities nearby."

The ruling in favor of St. Charles County came after the Eighth Circuit Court of Appeals upheld similar funeral restrictions for the city of Manchester and the state of Missouri.

"Families have the right to mourn their loved ones peacefully and privately," said St. Charles County Executive Steve Ehlmann. "I hope this ruling sends a message and helps to set more precedents."

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