

Downtown Hope Center v. Municipality of Anchorage, et al.

Significance: Can the government force a women’s homeless shelter to house biological men alongside women (most of whom have been victims of rape, sexual abuse, and domestic violence) in a shared, overnight sleeping facility?

Current Status: Anchorage is investigating Downtown Hope Center for allegedly violating a local law by providing safe shelter only to biological women. ADF has filed a motion for preliminary injunction in federal court to protect the Hope Center and the women at the Hope Center from the unjust application of this law.



Background: Anchorage is trying to force the Hope Center to house biological men alongside women in its overnight, shared sleeping facility. The Hope Center is a faith-based nonprofit organization that helps, feeds, and teaches the homeless. Through its overnight sleeping facility, the Hope Center also serves homeless women—most of whom have suffered rape, physical abuse, and domestic violence. The Hope Center will provide overnight housing for any biological woman who is otherwise eligible for its sleeping facility, which consists of one room with mattresses set three to five feet apart from one another. Although the Hope Center serves meals, provides clothing, laundry facilities, and job skills training to men and women during the day, its religious commitment to help battered and abused women require the Hope Center to provide a safe space for women to sleep and change without men. But Anchorage’s Equal Rights Commission is investigating the Hope Center for allegedly violating a local law after a biological man sought overnight housing and the Hope Center referred that man and paid for his transportation to a hospital because he was injured and inebriated. With this investigation, Anchorage is trying to force the Hope Center to house biological men alongside women in a shared, overnight sleeping facility. If Anchorage succeeds, it would not only force a religious ministry to abandon its mission and message, but also force homeless women to sleep alongside and interact with men in intimate settings—even though those women may have been beaten, raped, or sexually assaulted by a man the day before.

Key Points

- Downtown Hope Center’s duty is to protect the vulnerable women it serves.
- Virtually all the women Downtown Hope Center serves have suffered rape, physical abuse, and domestic violence. These women should not be forced to sleep or disrobe in the same room as a man.
- The government should not attack the very beliefs that lead this vital charity to serve battered women in need.
- Faith-based groups should be free to serve homeless and vulnerable women consistently with their beliefs.
- Banishing faith-based nonprofits from the community harms the needy and helpless those non-profits serve.

Key Facts

- The commission’s complaint is based upon a 2015 Anchorage ordinance ([AO No. 2015-96\(S-1\)](#)) which added “sexual orientation and gender identity to the grounds of discrimination” to a preexisting ordinance, even though the ordinance explicitly exempts homeless shelters.
- Quick facts about Downtown Hope Center (via www.downtownhopecenter.org):
 - Community-supported services include its women's shelter, culinary job skills training, daily meals, laundry, and clothing handout;
 - Serving neighbors in need for over 30 years
 - Over 160 individuals volunteer weekly
 - 450-600 cups of soup served daily; 142,000 meals prepared annually
 - Majority of funding from individual donations

The Bottom Line: Hope Center has a duty to protect the privacy, safety, and dignity of the vulnerable women it serves.