

# [***Texas AG sues a nonprofit that helps migrants, accusing it of 'alien harboring.' But the group calls the lawsuit 'unfounded'***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6BF1-6751-DY7V-G02S-00000-00&context=1516831)

CNN Wire

February 27, 2024 Tuesday 2:19 PM GMT

Copyright 2024 Cable News Network All Rights Reserved

**Length:** 1055 words

**Byline:** By Amy Simonson, Ed Lavandera and Holly Yan, CNN

**Dateline:** (CNN)

**Body**

(CNN) &#8212; Texas' Republican attorney general is suing [*a Catholic nonprofit that assists migrants*](https://annunciationhouse.org/about/), claiming his office has information "strongly suggesting" the group has engaged in "alien harboring, human smuggling, and operating a stash house," according to a [*news release*](https://www.texasattorneygeneral.gov/news/releases/attorney-general-ken-paxton-sues-end-ngos-operations-texas-after-discovering-potential-efforts).

Ken Paxton is now trying to revoke the registration of Annunciation House in El Paso, according to a [*court filing*](https://www.texasattorneygeneral.gov/sites/default/files/images/press/Annunciation%20House%20Answer%20and%20Counterclaim%20Filed.pdf) in the district court of El Paso.

Paxton's maneuver came in response to a lawsuit filed by Annunciation House, which obtained a [*temporary restraining order*](https://www.texasattorneygeneral.gov/sites/default/files/images/press/Annunciation%20House%20Answer%20and%20Counterclaim%20Filed.pdf) against the state's wide-ranging demand to disclose the organization's records [*"immediately."*](https://www.texasattorneygeneral.gov/sites/default/files/images/press/Annunciation%20House%20Answer%20and%20Counterclaim%20Filed.pdf)

According to the nonprofit, a representative from the attorney general's office came to Annunciation House on February 7, "stating the organization had one day to turn over a broad swath of records to the Attorney General without an explanation," the group [*said in a statement*](https://annunciationhouse.org/press-release/) last week.

"Annunciation House asked a Court to decide what documents the law permits the Attorney General to access," the nonprofit said. "There is nothing illegal about asking a Court to decide a person's rights."

Now, the Office of the Attorney General says it is seeking the revocation of the nonprofit's registration "on the grounds that it has violated the law and failed to permit OAG to inspect, examine and make copies of Annunciation House's records in response to a valid Request to Examine," according to a court filing.

The attorney general's lawsuit against the migrant shelter is viewed as an escalation in [*the ongoing feud*](https://www.cnn.com/2024/01/19/politics/immigration-border-mayors-joe-biden/index.html) between Texas' Republican political leaders and the federal government over how to handle the migrant crisis.

Since 2021, GOP Gov. Greg Abbott has dispatched thousands of state troopers and National Guard soldiers to border communities as part of a program called "[*Operation Lone Star*](https://www.cnn.com/2024/02/22/politics/greg-abbott-democrats-border-immigration/index.html)." Abbott often says Texas is doing the job the federal government is failing to do. And news of Paxton's filing came as the White House [*considers executive action to restrict migrants' ability*](https://www.cnn.com/2024/02/21/politics/biden-considering-executive-action-to-close-southern-border-sources-say/index.html) to seek asylum at the US-Mexico border if they crossed illegally.

[*The state's lawsuit*](https://www.texasattorneygeneral.gov/sites/default/files/images/press/Annunciation%20House%20Answer%20and%20Counterclaim%20Filed.pdf) now targets a religious-based shelter long credited with helping border and immigration authorities manage the migrant crisis, some advocates say.

"Shelters help limit chaos," Aaron Reichlin-Melnick, policy director for the American Immigration Council, [*posted on X*](https://twitter.com/ReichlinMelnick/status/1760130087192543574). "Paxton's lawsuit should send a shiver down the spine of every faith-based nonprofit in the state."

The attorney general's office alleges Annunciation House "appears to be openly and flagrantly violating many provisions of law in a systemic fashion," the filing said.

"Annunciation House has publicly claimed that it 'hous(es) close to 300 migrants' at a given time, 'many of whom are stuck in limbo because they' avoided law enforcement," the complaint says, attributing some of its information to an [*article by El Paso Matters*](https://elpasomatters.org/2023/01/20/el-paso-migrants-apply-for-asylum-with-annunciation-house/).

In the article, titled "Annunciation House helps undocumented immigrants apply for asylum," the nonprofit's director says some migrants want to seek asylum - but they fear that turning themselves in to authorities will lead to deportation.

"They're saying, 'We want to present ourselves. We want to get processed. We want to proceed with our asylum,'" director Ruben Garcia told El Paso Matters. "So from that was born the idea, let's have a workshop on asylum. It's about enabling asylum seekers to actually access the asylum process."

The attorney general's filing also alleges Annunciation House "appears to be engaged in the business of human smuggling."

"According to its own in-Court admission, Annunciation House 'contracts with a local company once or twice a week to transport migrants in passenger vans in groups of approximately 15," the filing said.

Notably, the Texas state government has boasted about busing [*tens of thousands*](https://gov.texas.gov/news/post/operation-lone-star-buses-over-50000-migrants-to-sanctuary-cities) of migrants to Northern cities in the past two years.

Annunciation House said its work is beneficial to the city of El Paso, helping keep "hundreds of thousands of refugees coming through our city off the streets and (giving) them food."

El Paso Mayor Oscar Leeser said while his office is still reviewing Paxton's actions, humanitarian groups play a key role in the community.

"Non-governmental organizations, humanitarian, and faith-based communities provide a critical service in our community during crisis situations and on a regular basis for individuals that have specific needs," the mayor said in a written statement.

"We are analyzing recent actions by the Texas Attorney General to determine legality based on both state and federal mandates and any involvement by the City of El Paso. That said, humanitarian aide (sic) is by its nature compassion-driven, and we regret any action at any level of our government that doesn't recognize that."

Annunciation House said Paxton's "illegal, immoral and anti-faith position" to shut down the organization is "unfounded."

"The AG has now made explicit that its real goal is not records but to shut down the organization. It has stated that it considers it a crime for a Catholic organization to provide shelter to refugees," the nonprofit said.

"Annunciation House has provided hospitality to hundreds of thousands of refugees for over forty-six years," [*the group's statement*](https://annunciationhouse.org/press-release/) said.

"It is a work recognized by the Catholic Church and is listed in the National Catholic Directory. Annunciation House has done this work of accompaniment out of the scriptural and Gospel mandate to welcome the stranger."

Bishop Mark J. Seitz supports [*of Annunciation House*](https://www.elpasodiocese.org/statement-in-support-of-annunciation-house.html?fbclid=IwAR3Pf5QvreJjtQ3THABXitESvwhDV6Zn-Iu4i_6YCDpnshdI7KZEYaYcXgc), he said in a statement from the Catholic Diocese of El Paso.

"This is not about ***politics***. I know the guests at Annunciation House, those trapped on the other side of the border and those who have died trying to cross it," Seitz said.

"I have encountered them and have experienced their pain, suffering and hope. This is about their lives and our shared human dignity. Our community's actions in this moment, the decisions that we make and the response that we offer today, will be judged by whether or not we rise to that standard."

CNN's Dave Alsup, Andy Rose, Priscilla Alvarez and MJ Lee contributed to this report.

By Amy Simonson, Ed Lavandera and Holly Yan, CNN

TM & © 2024 Cable News Network, Inc., a Time Warner Company. All rights reserved.

**Load-Date:** February 27, 2024

**End of Document**