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RELIGIOUS AND CIVIL LIBERTIES GROUPS ASK SUPREME COURT TO PROTECT RELIGIOUS SPEECH AND ASSEMBLY

September 22, 2014 - Christian Legal Society and nine religious and civil liberties groups today filed a brief in the United States Supreme Court in support of a church's constitutional right to post signs that are the same size as the signs that politicians are allowed to post. The Town of Gilbert, Arizona, allows politicians to display supersized signs but severely limits the size of a sign that the Good News Community Church wants to use to direct visitors to its weekly church services.

The brief argued that the Town's sign ordinance violates the freedom of speech. The Town places onerous restrictions on churches' ability to display temporary signs in public places that invite others to their Sunday morning church services and inform them of the time and location.

The sign ordinance also violates the freedom of assembly. Historically, signs that give notice of where and when meetings will take place have contributed to the success of several great social movements that began small but eventually grew. For example, signs assisted the American reform movements of the women suffragettes in the Nineteenth Century and the Civil Rights Movement of the Twentieth Century.

"Signs are particularly vital to poorly financed or small groups, including many fledgling religious congregations that lack a permanent church home and must meet in temporary facilities," said Kim Colby, Director of Christian Legal Society's Center for Law and Religious Freedom. "Religious meetings are just as important as political meetings, yet the Town of Gilbert favors political meetings by allowing supersized signs for political causes, yet restricting churches to much smaller signs."

The Christian Legal Society brief was joined by nine respected religious and civil liberties organizations that frequently advocate for all Americans' religious liberty: The Anglican Church in North America; Association of Christian Schools International; Christian Medical Association; The Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention; Evangelical Council for Financial Accountability; International Conference of Evangelical Chaplain Endorsers; The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod; The National Legal Foundation; and The Queens Federation of Churches.

The brief was prepared by Professor Thomas C. Berg and law students in the Religious Liberty Appellate Clinic at St. Thomas School of Law (Minnesota). The Supreme Court will hear oral argument in the case this winter and announce its decision by the end of June 2015.

The Christian Legal Society is a nationwide association of Christian attorneys, law students, and law professors. www.clsnet.org