

The Thomas More Society
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RILOTT V. ROCKFORD

Press Conference

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***Statement of Denise Mackura
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It is truly sad that we have to file this lawsuit to defend local Rockford citizens' first amend rights. Free speech is vital to our democracy. The Founders of our great nation wisely made it the very first guarantee of our Bill of Rights. Why? Because if we cannot express truth, we will be overrun by those in power. This case is a perfect example. The story of the Rockford bus bench is the story of a community filled with pain and suffering and looking for the relief provided only in a free and democratic society.

Why would one or more members of this community go through all the trouble and risk criminal prosecution, to vandalize a bus bench that spoke of the brutality of abortion? What would drive someone who was not a client of the abortion facility to harass and threaten a peaceful sidewalk counselor? Could it possibly be that those who felt compelled to erase the sign and try to scare away the protestors were doing so because they were trying to stop a much deeper, hidden pain? We all know that hiding pain does not eliminate it. For too long we have tried to hide the pain that abortion has caused in our society. It has poisoned our politics, our public policy and our personal relationships. We will never be able to deal with it if we don't express it, look for answers and healing.

When a government is complicit in the coverup of deep social wounds, it only prolongs the hurt and prevents resolution. We learned that from our nation's battle with slavery – what Frederick Douglass called “..the fatal poison of irresponsible power.” It is easy to see why Rockford would want to just tell pro-life advocates to go away. Or, as one police officer put it last Saturday: “If you don't like what you hear, then leave.” It satisfies the needs of the bureaucracy for everyone to pretend like nothing is wrong. Yet clearly something is terribly wrong if a simple expression of free speech can cause so many problems.

Free speech is the lifeblood of a democracy because it permits people to talk freely about what is wrong with their society, their government, the laws that govern their lives, and reach consensus and solutions. If they can't do this, they can't solve their problems. And so it is with abortion. If we can't talk about it, express our views on it, it will continue to poison our future. This is especially important in an election year, with so much at stake.

The City of Rockford, in cutting off free speech, is blocking real progress, real dialogue, real thinking by its citizens on an issue that has been troubling America ever since the Supreme Court thwarted the democratic process in *Roe v. Wade*. That's the real crime being addressed by this lawsuit. It is a crime against all of us who thought we lived in a free country. Isn't it time for the City to acknowledge that it was wrong to threaten to remove the bus bench, wrong to not fully prosecute those who would harass and intimidate those who are exercising their right of free speech, wrong to not protect its citizens? It is our hope that this lawsuit will inspire the City to do the right thing for its citizens.