

PRESS RELEASE

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Judge Shuts Down Free Speech **First Amendment rights of religion and free speech at stake**

Los Angeles County judge curtails the rights of freedom of speech outside L.A. County courthouses

On September 13, 2005, Judge William A. MacLaughlin issued a court order forbidding public speech on the public property of any courthouse in Los Angeles County. The order was delivered by two police officers to best-selling author and award-winning TV show host Ray Comfort this past Friday, as he addressed about 40 people on public property outside of the Bellflower city courthouse in Los Angeles County.

Comfort and his general manager, Emeal Zwayne, have made it a practice to speak outside the courthouse on almost every weekday for 2½ years. Comfort stated, “The freedom of speech and religion are basic rights guaranteed to every citizen. It is to give others this same freedom that American soldiers are fighting in Iraq. We were shocked by the court order. This isn’t Iraq. It’s the United States. But it’s another example of our religious freedoms being denied.”

Comfort spends 15–20 minutes addressing those outside the courts who choose to listen. He estimates that he has spoken to about 30,000 people this way, and feels he does so with respect and civility. Comfort explained, “I begin every morning by introducing myself, saying that I’m not part of the court system, that I’ve been doing this for years and have been assured personally by the sheriff that I have a right to be here, under my First Amendment freedom of speech rights. After this court order, I can no longer say that.”

Told by the officers delivering the order that in the last year they had received only one or two complaints, Comfort found the judge’s action all the more surprising. The court order affects not just Comfort’s ability to address people outside the Bellflower courthouse, but is a blanket order impacting all 49 courthouses in Los Angeles County.

“In his desire to stop us from speaking,” Comfort said, “Judge MacLaughlin shut down not only us. Now, no American citizens can exercise their First Amendment right to free speech on American soil outside of any of those courthouses. If this order is allowed to stand, where else will free speech be curtailed? What will be the next religious freedom that is taken away?”

Broadcast video footage of Emeal Zwayne speaking outside the Bellflower court can be seen at www.freespeechrights.com, showing that listeners appear to be receptive.”

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