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Couple: County Trying To Stop Home Bible Studies

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SAN DIEGO -- A local pastor and his wife claim they were interrogated by a San Diego County official, who then threatened them with escalating fines if they continued to hold Bible studies in their home, 10News reported.

Attorney Dean Broyles of The Western Center For Law & Policy was shocked with what happened to the pastor and his wife.

Broyles said, "The county asked, 'Do you have a regular meeting in your home?' She said, 'Yes.' 'Do you say amen?' 'Yes.' 'Do you pray?' 'Yes.' 'Do you say praise the Lord?' 'Yes.'"

The county employee notified the couple that the small Bible study, with an average of 15 people attending, was in violation of County regulations, according to Broyles.

Broyles said a few days later the couple received a written warning that listed "unlawful use of land" and told them to "stop religious assembly or apply for a major use permit" -- a process that could cost tens of thousands of dollars.

"For churches and religious assemblies there's big parking concerns, there's environmental impact concerns when you have hundreds or thousands of people gathering. But this is a different situation, and we believe that the application of the religious assembly principles to this Bible study is certainly misplaced," said Broyles.

News of the case has rapidly spread across Internet blogs and has spurred various reactions.

Broyles said his clients have asked to stay anonymous until they give the county a demand letter that states by enforcing this regulation the county is violating their First Amendment right to freely exercise their religion.

Broyles also said this case has broader implications.

"If the county thinks they can shut down groups of 10 or 15 Christians meeting in a home, what about people who meet regularly at home for poker night? What about people who meet for Tupperware parties? What about people who are meeting to watch baseball games on a regular basis and support the Chargers?" Broyles asked.

Broyles and his clients plan to give the County their demand letter this week.

If the County refuses to release the pastor and his wife from obtaining the permit, they will consider a lawsuit in federal court.

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