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MARJORIE R. ESMAN
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

May 15, 2009

by mail and fax 337-332-6023
Mayor Jack Dale Delhomme
101 Berard Street
Breaux Bridge, LA 70517

RE: distribution of religious literature

Dear Mayor Delhomme:

I write in response to reports of a dispute over the distribution of religious literature during the recent Breaux Bridge Crawfish Festival. The free exercise of religious expression is, as you know, a fundamental right guaranteed under the United States and the Louisiana Constitutions. The ACLU has a long history of supporting religious freedom and expression, including expression in public places. We are presently litigating on behalf of a man arrested for quoting Bible verses on the streets of Zachary. We have handled many similar cases in the past and will continue to support the rights of anyone to engage in religious expression in public.

The sidewalks of Breaux Bridge, as any other city, are public spaces open to everyone. They cannot be preempted by a private group for private purposes. Neither religious nor any other speech on public streets or in public spaces may be curtailed to benefit a private group. I therefore encourage the City of Breaux Bridge to amend any ordinances that impair free speech of any kind in public places.

I am currently a part-time resident, and formerly a full-time resident, of Breaux Bridge. In the early 1980's I was a member of the board of directors of the Breaux Bridge Celebrations Association, now the Breaux Bridge Crawfish Festival Association. I therefore take this as not only a professional but also a personal matter.

I urge you and the City Council to take appropriate steps to ensure that all free expression, including religious expression, is supported in the public places of Breaux Bridge.

Sincerely,

Marjorie R. Esman
Executive Director

cc: Chester Cedars, by fax (337) 394-4282