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CAIR-Chicago: Muslim Businesses Unfairly Targeted by Village Mayor

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(Chicago, IL, 10/21/10) -- CAIR-Chicago filed a discrimination complaint in federal today court against the Southwest Suburban Village of Worth on behalf of Ala Alsherbini, a local Muslim business owner.

The suit alleges that the Village, through its mayor, trustees and employees, intentionally began a practice of targeting Middle Eastern owned businesses through the issuance of tickets, fines and the revocation of business licenses in order to implement a policy of driving out Middle Eastern owned businesses from the village.

Last year the village issued a notice to Dr. Alsherbini seeking to revoke the business license of his hookah lounge, Friends Café, for supposed violations of the Village Code. Upon investigation, however, it became evident that the alleged violations were baseless.

The notice complained that the café was noisy, attracted "suspicious persons" and "criminal activity," and "allowed broken glass and garbage to accumulate." Mayor Keller also claimed he found beer cans in the café parking lot. However, Dr. Alsherbini does not serve alcohol nor allows it on the premises and the Café's speaker system is incapable of producing a volume that can be heard outside of the café.

Despite the fact that there is a liquor store that shares a parking lot with the Café, Mayor Keller insisted on blaming Dr. Alsherbini. No complaint was ever made to the liquor store regarding the littering or noise disturbance allegations.

The Village also alleged that they received photographs depicting underage drinking at Friends' Café, but when Dr. Alsherbini's counsel requested the photos the Village of Worth did not provide them and instead dropped its allegations.

With the help of CAIR-Chicago's civil rights director, Christina Abraham, Dr. Alsherbini entered into an agreement with the Village to close the café earlier every day. Despite this, Worth officers have been repeatedly entering the café to enforce closing hours, at times before actual closing hours. The presence of police officers created an environment of intimidation and fear for customers and has led to a significant loss of business for Dr. Alsherbini.

"The evidence suggests that Village trustees, along with the mayor, have been trying to shut down Middle Eastern owned businesses by targeting them for fines and other methods of harassment," said Christina Abraham, Civil Rights Director. "This sort of selective enforcement of the rules is a violation of federal law and an unfair practice by these village officials."

CAIR is America's largest Muslim civil liberties and advocacy organization. Its mission is to enhance the understanding of Islam, encourage dialogue, protect civil liberties, empower American Muslims, and build coalitions that promote justice and mutual understanding.

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