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To: Interested Parties

From: NARAL Pro-Choice America Research Team

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Anti-Choice Extremist Mark Lee Dickson's Ties to Texas Senate Bill 8

Today, Texas' extreme and draconian ban on abortion, which puts a \$10,000+ bounty on the heads of people who support someone seeking abortion care after about six weeks of pregnancy, went into effect. One of the main figures behind the bill, SB 8, is Texas-based anti-choice activist Mark Lee Dickson.

Overview on Mark Lee Dickson

Mark Lee Dickson is the Director of Right to Life East Texas and has identified himself as the pastor of Sovereign Love Church in Longview, which no longer appears to be operating. [Reporting indicates](#) Dickson became active in the anti-choice movement in 2012 when he began harassing patients and staff outside of an abortion clinic in Louisiana. In 2019, Dickson lobbied for a Texas bill that would have [criminalized abortion without exception](#) and made it possible to convict people who sought abortion care of homicide, putting them at risk of the death penalty. Dickson was [named as a defendant](#) in a lawsuit brought by abortion providers, abortion funds, practical support networks, doctors, health center staff, and clergy members challenging Texas' Senate Bill 8 after he posted to Facebook openly calling on his followers to sue their local abortion providers under the law.

Dickson's So-Called "Sanctuary Cities for the Unborn"

[Dickson is the driving force](#) behind so-called "Sanctuary Cities for the Unborn." His direction and lobbying has led to [37 cities](#) passing a municipal ordinance banning abortion. Dickson has indicated that his [opposition to sanctuary cities for immigrants](#) inspired him to advocate for these ordinances. He has also stated he was inspired to pursue the ordinances after [an amendment to a 2019 Texas bill](#) targeting public funding for Planned Parenthood and other health care providers that provide abortion care stated the bill wouldn't prevent a city or county from "prohibiting" abortions. Waskom, Texas was the first town to pass an ordinance in June 2019, prompting Dickson to claim that any abortion providers who attempted to establish a clinic in the town would be classified as ["criminal organizations."](#) Shortly after, Dickson was [invited to appear on Fox News](#), bolstering his efforts to pass the ordinance in other places. The broad majority of these so-called "sanctuary cities" are located in Texas, though Dickson has also found success in [Ohio and Nebraska](#). He has also lobbied for the ordinances in [Michigan](#) and [Florida](#), indicating his interest in expanding the campaign nationwide.

Overlap Between SB 8 & "Sanctuary City" Ordinances

Dickson's efforts to advance so-called "sanctuary cities" ordinances appear to be closely linked to SB 8, which bans abortion after six weeks—before many people even realize they are pregnant—by imposing civil penalties on any person or organization that assists a pregnant person in accessing abortion care. Texas State Senator Bryan Hughes, who [wrote](#) and [introduced](#) SB 8, [assisted Dickson](#)



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in drafting the model "sanctuary city" ordinance to "ensure [it] could withstand a legal challenge" by [connecting him](#) with legal experts.

One way Hughes and Dickson attempt to protect the "sanctuary city" ordinances from legal challenges is by including both [private and public enforcement mechanisms](#). The private enforcement mechanism in [ordinances such as Waskom's](#) empowers "any surviving relative of the abortion unborn child" to sue any "person or entity" who provides abortion care or assists someone in receiving abortion care. In addition, the ordinance allows "any private citizen" to sue abortion providers or those helping someone seek care on behalf of the state government. One key difference between this mechanism and the one included in Texas SB 8 is that under SB 8, private citizens are not representing the state of Texas. The public enforcement mechanism is dependent on *Roe v. Wade* being overturned, but Dickson argues that the ordinances are "[preventative](#)" and designed to stop abortion providers from opening clinics to provide care in the target cities.

Ties to the Attempted Insurrection and Anti-Semitism

Dickson's extremism is not limited to his support for anti-choice measures that ban abortion and criminalize pregnant people. Following the 2020 election, Dickson was active in sharing disinformation claiming that President Joe Biden's win was illegitimate and part of an "[orchestrated coup](#)." He parroted multiple conspiracy theories about "electronic glitches" occurring in [Georgia](#) and [Michigan](#), and [falsely claimed](#) that "voter fraud [had] been committed in record numbers." Dickson also [supported an effort to sue Mike Pence](#) after Pence declined to overthrow the results of the election. Dickson traveled to Washington, DC for the January 6 rally opposing the election results and posted [multiple photos](#) of himself participating in the insurrection at the Capitol. Based on the photos, Dickson appears to have infiltrated the police barricade and was among those present on the steps of the Capitol during the attack. On the same day, Dickson [baselessly claimed](#) that Antifa was responsible for the destruction and violence at the Capitol.

In addition to his participation in the insurrection and his ties to the anti-immigrant movement, Dickson has promoted [anti-Semitic conspiracy theories](#) about George Soros on his Facebook page, sharing [an article](#) that falsely implied Soros was plotting to fraudulently oust Donald Trump from office in 2020.