



## **Veterans for Peace sues City of Boston for St. Patrick's Peace Parade permit**

Suit challenges City's eleven month delay in acting on permit application and charges favoritism for South Boston parade organizers who continue to exclude most LGBT groups.

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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BOSTON -- The local Veterans for Peace Chapter 9, Smedley D. Butler Brigade (VFP) filed a First Amendment lawsuit in federal court today against the City of Boston because the city has refused to act in a timely way on VFP's application for a permit to hold its annual St. Patrick's Peace Parade beginning at noon in Boston on March 15. The delay prevents VFP from being able to effectively organize for its parade and impedes its message.

Since 2011, VFP has organized its inclusive, non-discriminatory parade along the same route used by the South Boston Allied War Veterans Council (AWVC), a group that has refused for many years to allow gay rights groups and others, including VFP, to march with identifying signs. According to Patrick Scanlon, the coordinator of the Smedley D. Butler Brigade of VFP, the AWVC parade has begun at 1:00 p.m. in the past, and the city has relegated the VFP's parade to commencing various distances behind the AWVC parade, forcing it to begin late in the afternoon.

Scanlon said that despite a recent deal touted by Boston Mayor Marty Walsh, in which the AWVC will allow one gay group, "OutVets," to march in the next AWVC parade, the AWVC continues to bar most gay rights, peace and environmental groups. It is not an inclusive parade like VFP's.

"Veterans for Peace applied on March 25, 2014 for a permit to march at noon this coming March 15 to celebrate St. Patrick's Day," said Scanlon. "We asked the City three times, in June, September and October what was happening with our application, and no one from the City ever responded." The City's refusal to act on the VFP parade application makes it very difficult for VFP to do all the organizing needed to hold a parade, he said.

"Unbelievably, the AWVC has told us in the past that they did not want us in their parade because they did not want the word 'peace' associated with the word 'veteran,'" Scanlon said. "St. Patrick was a man of peace, so the celebration of St. Patrick—the patron saint of Ireland—should be a day to reflect on and celebrate this great saint's deeds and words. Veterans for Peace celebrates the life of Saint Patrick and the proud Irish traditions without militarism. Our Peace Parade celebrating St. Patrick's Day is inclusive and open to anyone who would like to walk for peace. As far as we know, this is the only annual peace

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parade anywhere in the entire country." VFP uses the phrase "The People's Parade for Peace, Equality, Jobs, Environmental Stewardship, Social and Economic Justice" to describe the event.

John Reinstein, a cooperating attorney for the ACLU of Massachusetts, which is bringing the case, explained that the City has violated VFP's First Amendment rights by refusing to act in a timely way on the early VFP request for a permit and by favoring later applications from the AWVC and a road race group, even though those events do not conflict with the VFP parade. He noted that the parade route is already set up and ready by noon when VFP wishes to begin its parade.

"The City acts as if it can just ignore permit applications or hand out or deny permits willy-nilly," said Reinstein. "It doesn't use any clear standards and hasn't even followed its own regulation on parade permits. These permit systems are supposed to be neutrally and fairly enforced. This was anything but that." Attorneys on the case will be asking the federal court to issue an injunction ordering the City to grant a parade permit to VFP for March 15, starting at noon.

Sarah Wunsch, deputy legal director of the ACLU of Massachusetts, acknowledged that the Supreme Court has held that the Allied War Veterans Council of South Boston had its own First Amendment right to exclude groups from its privately run parade. "But," she explained, "the Supreme Court ruling doesn't mean the City can ignore the application by Vets for Peace to parade earlier in the day or can force them to parade after the AWVC parade."

VFP Smedley D. Butler Brigade is a chapter of the national VFP. Founded in 1985, Veterans for Peace is a national organization of men and women of all eras and duty stations, including from World War II, the Korean, Vietnam, Gulf, Iraq, and Afghanistan wars, as well as other conflicts. Veterans for Peace works to expose the true costs of war and to support veterans and civilian victims. For more information, go to [www.smedleyvfp.org](http://www.smedleyvfp.org)

For more information about the ACLU of Massachusetts, go to:  
<http://www.aclum.org>

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