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**For immediate release**

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**Federal lawsuit filed against Anne Arundel County for obstructing church school project—  
County legislation targets Riverdale Baptist Church in violation of RLUIPA and Federal and  
Constitutional provisions**

After trying to work with Anne Arundel County for over 4 years in order to comply with all its numerous regulations to build a church school on its property, Riverdale Baptist Church and its church school subsidiary, Riverdale Baptist School dba Arundel Bay Christian Academy, have had to file a federal lawsuit against Anne Arundel County and its officials in federal district court charging violations of the U.S. and Maryland Constitutions and the federal Religious Land Use and Institutionalized Persons Act of 2000 (“RLUIPA”). The lawsuit challenges the delaying tactics of the County in preventing the school’s construction, charges religious discrimination violations, and challenges new laws specifically targeting the school’s property to prevent such church school construction. The lawsuit is also joined by parents representing the numerous children on the School’s waiting list unable to attend the school, as well as children who have attended the school in its temporary location, who have been unable to fully exercise their religious freedoms because of lack of an adequate facility.

The Church has operated a religious school in Anne Arundel County for over 15 years, presently providing a Christian education for approximately 175 students, but has scores more on its waiting list. Additionally, the school currently exists primarily in modular buildings leased temporarily from another church. As a result, the Church and school do not have the space to engage in various programs important to its religious and educational mission. The Church also has operated a church school in Prince Georges County for over 30 years, presently providing a Christian education to approximately 900 students.

After the Church purchased the property in Lothian, Maryland in 2002, with a vision to provide a better Christian education for more students, the County has unrelentingly acted to thwart the Church from building its own facility, first denying it grading permits and a building permit for various subjective reasons, then enacting various pieces of legislation effectively gerrymandering the new church school building out of existence. After the church had complied with all the objective and subjective county regulations, in 2005, the County then adopted new code amendments designating the two roads on which the Church’s property is located as “scenic and historic,” attempting to prevent such church school construction. After that attempt, the County then passed additional laws preventing “private schools” from locating on such roads. Then, using a belt-and-suspender strategy, the County also passed legislation re-designating the roads abutting the Church’s property as “collector” roads rather than “arterial” roads—and then prohibited private schools from locating on collector roads. The only church school apparently affected by these legislative maneuvers was Arundel Bay Christian Academy.

“Anne Arundel County must be held accountable for its discriminatory and inequitable treatment of this church school,” said Roman P. Storzer, nationally recognized constitutional and RLUIPA lawyer who is assisting the Church’s lead counsel Robert Showers. “The right of students and parents to choose their manner of education—especially a religious education—is a value enshrined in the First Amendment. The County’s ordinances now place the Church in the position of a second-class citizen; it and it alone was targeted by these new laws” said Robert Showers.

This targeting—which only affects the Church’s school and no other private schools in the County—

violates antidiscrimination provisions of the First Amendment and Equal Protection Clause, as well as RLUIPA. Moreover, a public school would still be able to build on the Church's property unhindered.

Riverdale Baptist Church is represented in this lawsuit by its lead counsel and long time attorney **Robert Showers** of Simms Showers LLP, a well known church law and constitutional attorney with offices in Baltimore Md. and Northern Virginia, **John Stepanovich** of Lentz, Stepanovich & Bergethon PLC, a Virginia Beach constitutional trial attorney with prior national RLUIPA experience and **Roman P. Storzer** of Storzer & Greene, P.L.L.C., a New York- and Washington-based law firm representing religious institutions across the nation and who had the first successful church case under RLUIPA.

A copy of the filed Complaint is available upon request.