

The *Thomas More Law Center* Case

Case Name: *Thomas More Law Center v. Rodriguez*

Case Status: Supreme Court ruled 6-3 in favor of Thomas More Law Center on July 1, 2021.

Significance: Whether California’s requirement that nonprofits annually disclose their major donors’ names and addresses to fundraise in the state.



Background: Thomas More Law Center, a nonprofit organization based in Michigan, defends and promotes religious freedom, moral and family values, and the sanctity of human life. Roughly 5 percent of its supporters are California residents, and it has operated as a charity in good standing with California’s attorney general for many years. However, in March 2012, the Attorney General’s Office began to harass the law center and demand the names and addresses of its major donors even though the center’s supporters, clients, and employees have faced intimidation, death threats, hate mail, boycotts, and even an assassination attempt from ideological opponents. California has no regulatory need for requesting the information.

The petition notes that *NAACP v. Alabama*—which protected NAACP supporters from being targeted by white supremacists—has protected freedom of association for over 60 years, and today’s environment is no time to remove that key safeguard.

The U.S. Supreme Court ruled that California’s donor disclosure regulation violates the First Amendment rights of charities and their supporters.

Key Points

- We’ve already seen how publicly revealing political donors with the intent of doing harm (known as “doxing”) can ruin careers and corrode civil discourse.
- Givers would have good reason to fear being doxed—especially in today’s toxic cultural climate.
- Everyone deserves a voice, not merely those able to weather abuse.

Key Quotes from the Supreme Court

- “[...] California casts a dragnet for sensitive donor information from tens of thousands of charities each year, even though that information will become relevant in only a small number of cases involving filed complaints.”
- “In fact, a dramatic mismatch exists between the interest the Attorney General seeks to promote and the disclosure regime that he has implemented.”
- “California’s disclosure requirement imposes a widespread burden on donors’ associational rights [...]”
- “The gravity of privacy concerns” span the “ideological spectrum, and indeed the full range of human endeavors: from the American Civil Liberties Union to the Proposition 8 Legal Defense Fund; from the Council on American-Islamic Relations to the Zionist Organization of America; from Feeding America—Eastern Wisconsin to PBS Reno.”

The Bottom Line: Every American is free to peacefully support causes they believe in without fear of harassment or intimidation.