



Written by [Dave Bohon](#) on October 20, 2018

Christian Filmmakers Battle Minnesota Over Same-Sex Marriage

A couple known for their Christian-themed films are suing the state of Minnesota over a law that would require them to film same-sex “weddings” despite the fact that doing so would violate their deeply held religious convictions.

Carl and Angel Larsen own [Telescope Media Group](#), a film studio in St. Cloud, Minnesota, that “exists to glorify God through top-quality media production,” according to the company website. Part of the company’s business comes from producing videos of weddings. As reported by the *Minneapolis Star Tribune*, in 2016 the Larsens filed a lawsuit against Minnesota’s human rights ordinance, which would require them to go against their Christian convictions and serve same-sex couples who ask them to film their wedding ceremonies.



In 2017 U.S. District Judge John Tunheim dismissed the lawsuit, claiming that the couple’s plan to post a notice on their company website that they would not serve same-sex weddings was “akin to a ‘White Applicants Only’ sign” in a business, and ruling that their intent would amount to unconstitutional discrimination against homosexuals.

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Since then the conservative legal advocacy group Alliance Defending Freedom (ADF) has stepped in to file an appeal of the ruling on behalf of the Larsens. On October 16 the Eighth U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals heard the case, with ADF attorney Jeremy Tedesco explaining: “This is a case that squarely presents the question that has been bedeviling courts and governments about how far can the government go when it comes to marriage. Can they force people to promote ideas about marriage that violate their beliefs?”

Tedesco argued that the state of Minnesota shouldn’t be able to “threaten filmmakers with fines and jail time to force them to create films that violate their beliefs. Carl and Angel are storytellers — they script, stage, conduct interviews, capture footage, select music, edit and more — all to tell compelling stories through film that promote their religious beliefs.”

Carl Larsen noted that he and his wife have worked “with many LGBT people on our film projects. We benefit from their creativity, their friendship, and their business. Our ability to laugh, dialogue, and work together gives us great hope that our nation can transcend political and cultural disagreements that so easily fracture our communities. But the Minnesota government is attempting to destroy that hope.”



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However, Minnesota Human Rights Commissioner Kevin Lindsey likened the Larsens' efforts to honor their Christian faith to discriminating against interracial couples. "In this case we are talking about two individuals who love each other and may wish to get married, and if those individuals face the same type of discrimination that those interracial couples did in the 1950s or '60s, isn't that a compelling interest of the state?" said Lindsey. "For us it is truly about conduct. Everyone should have the right to be protected under the law when they buy goods and services."

Tedesco called such a comparison "absurd," recalling that when the U.S. Supreme Court ruled for same-sex "marriage" in 2015, the justices emphasized that the Christian beliefs inspiring those who oppose homosexual unions are "based on decent and honorable convictions."

ADF noted that business owners who violate Minnesota's discrimination law could face penalties that include triple compensatory damages, punitive damages of up to \$25,000, a criminal penalty of up to \$1,000, and a stint in jail of up to 90 days.

"Americans should have the freedom to disagree on significant matters of conscience, which is why everyone, regardless of their view of marriage, should support the Larsens," said Tedesco. "Government is supposed to be freedom's greatest protector, not its greatest threat. That's why we are asking the Eighth Circuit to reverse the district court's decision."

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