



Written by [Dave Bohon](#) on April 11, 2013

Washington Florist Refuses to Serve Same-sex Wedding; Faces Lawsuit

Washington State's [Attorney General announced](#) that his office has filed a discrimination lawsuit against a state florist after she refused to serve a pair of homosexual men in their marriage ceremony. Attorney General Bob Ferguson said that it is his job "to enforce the laws of the state of Washington. Under the Consumer Protection Act it is unlawful to discriminate against customers on the basis of sexual orientation. If a business provides a product or service to opposite-sex couples for their weddings, then it must provide same-sex couples the same product or service." The [Associated Press](#) noted that the state's anti-discrimination law was updated in 2006 to include sexual orientation.



Problems began for Florist Barronelle Stutzman, owner of [Arlene's Flowers](#) in Richland, Washington, after longtime customer Robert Ingersoll asked her to provide the flower arrangements for his September 2012 "wedding" with homosexual partner Curt Freed. "He said he decided to get married, and before he got through I grabbed his hand and said, 'I am sorry. I can't do your wedding because of my relationship with Jesus Christ,'" Stutzman told [Seattlepi.com](#). She noted that it was the first time in 37 years that she had declined a wedding.

In a statement shortly after her refusal, Stutzman said Ingersoll "has been in many times and purchased flowers from us." She added, however, that "when it came to doing his wedding, I said I could not do it because of my relationship with Jesus Christ. He thanked me and said he respected my opinion. We talked and gave each other a hug and he left."

Ingersoll said he and Freed felt compelled to file a complaint against Stutzman, even though, he told the Kennewick, Washington *Tri-City Herald*, "We're both passionate about seeing people succeed and that nobody should be hurt or in pain." He indicated, however, that his pain trumped Stutzman's. "This is one of those things — it's very hurtful," he told the paper. "I probably haven't felt this much pain since I was in high school and people called me names, and I'm 42." He added that "I'm not someone who wants to be in the limelight but it's kind of pushed [me] there."

According to [Seattlepi.com](#), Ingersoll and his partner have added to the florist's legal headaches by making a set of demands on her through the ACLU. According to the Seattle news site, ACLU attorney Michael Scott sent a letter to Stutzman laying out three conditions it would take to get Ingersoll and Freed to back off from a lawsuit they plan to file through the ACLU. They are:

- You agree not to refuse to provide flowers and other goods and services to any person on the basis of



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his or her sexual orientation.

- You agree to write a letter of apology to Mr. Freed and Mr. Ingersoll to be published in the *Tri-City Herald*.
- You agree to donate \$5,000 to the Vista Youth Center, in lieu of payment of attorney's fees."

Scott warned that "if this matter cannot be satisfactorily resolved, Mr. Freed and Mr. Ingersoll have authorized our law firm, acting as cooperating attorneys for the ACLU and ACLU of Washington, to commence legal action against you for violation of the Washington Law Against Discrimination."

In a parting shot at Stutzman, the ACLU lawyer said in his letter, "Your refusal to sell flowers to Mr. Ingersoll and Mr. Freed for their wedding has hurt them very deeply. It is a disturbing reminder of the history of discrimination and disparate treatment that they and other gay men and women have experienced over the years."

The ACLU's intrusion can be added to the \$2,000 fine Stutzman faces from the state for refusing to cave in to its anti-discrimination demands and the attorney general's efforts to force her to act in conflict with her moral convictions.

Stutzman's attorney, Justin Bristol, argued that "what the state is saying is you are compelled to express assent on an issue that you don't agree with, and that violates the First Amendment." He said that the case is solely about his client's personal convictions. "It's not a public accommodation case," he said. "She simply doesn't believe in gay marriage. She believes marriage should be between a man and a woman." Added Bristol: "Can the state require a painter to paint a portrait of a gay couple? Could the state require a musician to write a song? Can the government compel them to say something they don't want to say? It violates the First Amendment."

[Fox News](#) reported that state and national pro-family groups have stepped forward to support Stutzman and warn of the implications of such state-empowered lawsuits. "You may not be a florist, and you may have made a different decision, but liberty is at stake for all of us," said Joseph Backholm, executive director of the [Family Policy Institute of Washington](#). "Draw your line in the sand right here." Backholm e-mailed supporters, asking them to take a stand for the florist. "Don't ignore the bully just because he hasn't punched you in the mouth yet," he wrote. "A small business owner is looking at years of litigation and huge legal expenses because she won't bow to the political elites."

Peter Sprigg of the [Family Research Council](#) warned that if same-sex "marriage" becomes the law of the land, businesses — as well as private individuals and institutions — can expect attacks similar to the one Stutzman is facing. "People need to be aware that this is the underlying motive for the push for same-sex marriage," Sprigg told Fox News. "It's not just about legal rights and benefits. It's about forcing everyone in society to recognize [same-sex] relationships as being one hundred percent equal to opposite-sex marriages."

Stutzman is one of several business owners who have been targeted over the past couple of years for their refusal on moral grounds to do business with homosexuals. In June of last year Elaine and John Huguenin, owners of a photography studio in New Mexico, were [fined \\$7,000](#) after they refused to provide their services to a pair of lesbians who had asked them to shoot photos of their homosexual "commitment" ceremony.

Similarly, in 2011, Victoria Childress, the owner of [Victoria's Cake Cottage](#) in Des Moines, Iowa, was [threatened with legal action](#) when she refused to bake a wedding cake for a lesbian pair's commitment



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ceremony.

And in Lexington, Kentucky, the Christian owners of [Hands On Originals](#), a custom t-shirt business, became the target of a homosexual group's [anti-discrimination complaint](#) after the business politely refused to produce shirts for a local "gay pride" event.

Evangelical leader [Ed Stetzer](#) has warned that those with moral convictions against homosexuality, particularly within the Christian community, are likely to face increasing attacks if they rightly choose to stay true to those convictions. Even though "it is easy to make the case ... that homosexual practice is incompatible with scripture," Stetzer wrote in his blog, "it will be an exceedingly difficult case to make in today's culture" — given the aggressive campaign to make homosexuality an accepted and celebrated lifestyle. While Christians can try to find common ground with homosexuals in an effort to show grace and tolerance, Stetzer wrote that ultimately they "will still have to deal with an issue that the world perceives as narrow and bigoted."



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