

Another Christian Judge Faces Removal From Bench

Judge Ruth Neely, a local magistrate judge who has served the community of Pinedale, Wyoming, a rural community of about 2,000 people, for more than 20 years. She has had a career of impeccable service, with local mayors and citizens praising her fairness and impartiality.

But following the U.S. Supreme Court's opinion in *Obergefell v. Hodges*, she said her religious beliefs would prevent her from performing a same-sex wedding—even though she's never been asked to do so—her career may soon be over. The Wyoming Commission on Judicial Conduct and Ethics has determined she should be banned for life from the judiciary and pay up to \$40,000 in fines.

Neely's case is now before the Wyoming Supreme Court, where she is being represented by the Alliance Defending Freedom. Wednesday, the Becket Fund for Religious Liberty also filed an amicus brief on her behalf.

In Wyoming, judges like her are not required by law to perform marriages, nor are they compensated by the state for doing so. And, they can decline to perform weddings for literally any other reason one can imagine.

The commission, in its finding, ignored the pleas of LGBT citizens of Pinedale to determine that Neely “manifested a bias” that makes her permanently unfit to serve as a judge. If upheld by the Wyoming Supreme Court, it would be the first time in U.S. history that a judge was removed from office because of his or her religious beliefs about marriage.

“As a local LGBT couple who actually knows Judge Neely put it: Punishing Judge Neely for her religious beliefs would be ‘obscene and offensive,’” Becket Fund legal counsel Daniel

Blomberg said. "They were right. In America, the government doesn't get to punish people for their religious beliefs—especially not for beliefs that the U.S. Supreme Court itself, in the very opinion that recognized same-sex marriage, said were 'decent and honorable' and held 'in good faith by reasonable and sincere people.'

"Unfortunately, the agency is trying make an example out of Judge Neely to intimidate any other judge that doesn't toe the agency's line on marriage. But the constitution doesn't allow government agents to purge the judiciary of anyone who holds 'heretical' views about marriage."