

Colorado Baker Scores Huge Victory for Religious Rights at U.S. Supreme Court

The U.S. Supreme Court on Monday handed a narrow victory to a Christian baker from Colorado who refused for religious reasons to make a wedding cake for a gay couple.

The justices, in a 7-2 decision, faulted the Colorado Civil Rights Commission's handling of the claims brought against Jack Phillips, saying it had showed a hostility to religion. In doing so, the commission violated his religious rights under the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution.

But the court did not issue a definitive ruling on the circumstances under which people can seek exemptions from anti-discrimination laws based on their religious views.

The commission had said Phillips violated the Colorado anti-discrimination law that bars businesses from refusing service based on race, sex, marital status or sexual orientation by rebuffing gay couple David Mullins and Charlie Craig in 2012.

Two of the court's four liberals, Stephen Breyer and Elena Kagan, joined the five conservative justices in the ruling authored by Justice Anthony Kennedy.

"The commission's hostility was inconsistent with the First Amendment's guarantee that our laws be applied in a manner that is neutral toward religion," Kennedy wrote, referring to the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution.

"The outcome of cases like this in other circumstances must await further elaboration in the courts, all in the context of recognizing that these disputes must be resolved with tolerance, without undue disrespect to sincere religious beliefs, and without subjecting gay persons to indignities

when they seek goods and services in an open market," Kennedy said.

Of the 50 states, 21, including Colorado, have anti-discrimination laws protecting gay people.

The closely watched case before the Supreme Court, which in 2015 legalized same-sex marriage nationwide, pitted gay rights against religious liberty. President Donald Trump's administration intervened in the case in support of Phillips. Christian leaders applauded the decision.

"Today, the Supreme Court ruled 7-2 in favor of Jack Phillips and more importantly, the First Amendment," said Tim Wildmon, president of the American Family Association. "The high court specifically rebuked the Colorado Commission for its demonstrable venomous hostility toward Mr. Phillips' Christian beliefs in handing down their decision. This is an important day for all who value liberty in general and religious liberty in particular."

Dr. Jerry A. Johnson, president and CEO of the National Religious Broadcasters, lauded Phillips for his courage to fight the case.

"The Supreme Court was absolutely correct to overturn the clear religious discrimination perpetrated by the state of Colorado against Jack Phillips," said Dr. Jerry A. Johnson, president and CEO of NRB. "A 7-2 ruling is a strong affirmation of the central importance of religious liberty to our nation. This decision affirms Americans' freedom to believe, to speak and to live their faith. Politicians who are still intent on currying favor with the well-funded radical left should take a hard look at this case and correct their course of intolerance before they further trample on America's fundamental freedoms. I thank Jack for fighting on the front lines for us all. I also commend NRB member Alliance Defending Freedom for yet another victory before the highest court in

our land.”