

# Kentucky Christian Business Owner Scores a Big Win for Religious Liberty

People of faith not only have a right to freely express their beliefs, but the government can't force them to express ideas that are contrary to their deeply held beliefs.

That's what the Kentucky Court of Appeals decided Friday in the case of a Lexington printer who declined an order that would have forced him to promote a message in conflict with his Christian beliefs. This is the second time Blaine Adamson, owner of Hands On Originals, has successfully defended his rights against the Lexington-Fayette Urban County Human Rights Commission.

In 2012, Adamson declined to print shirts with a message promoting the Lexington Pride Festival, an event that the Gay and Lesbian Services Organization hosted. Although he declined to print the shirts because of the message that would have been on them, he nevertheless offered to refer the GLSO to another printer who would have made the shirts. Unsatisfied, the GLSO filed a complaint with the commission—despite eventually receiving the shirts for free from another printer.

In 2014, the commission determined that Adamson must print messages that conflict with his faith when customers ask him to do so. Attorneys with the Alliance Defending Freedom appealed the commission's order to the Fayette Circuit Court, which reversed the ruling and affirmed Adamson's religious freedom—but that wasn't the end of the fight.

The commission appealed the lower court decision to the Kentucky Court of Appeals. It, too, found no reason to support the commission's decision. The opinion written by Chief Judge Joy A. Kramer found that Adamson did not engage in unlawful

discrimination because there was no evidence to demonstrate that he “refused any individual the full and equal enjoyment of the goods, services, facilities, privileges, advantages and accommodations it offered to everyone else because the individual in question had a specific sexual orientation or gender identity.”

In a concurring opinion, Judge Debra Hembree Lambert wrote that Hands On Originals is protected by Kentucky’s Religious Freedom Restoration Statute, and that Adamson has the right under that law to operate his business consistently with his “sincerely held religious beliefs.”

“Americans should always have the freedom to believe, the freedom to express those beliefs and the freedom to *not* express ideas that would violate their conscience,” ADF Senior Counsel Jim Campbell said. “Today’s decision is a victory for printers and other creative professionals who serve all people but cannot promote all messages. It is also a victory for all Americans because it reassures us all that, no matter what you believe, the law can’t force you to express a message in conflict with your deepest convictions.”

Family Research Council had been following this case closely. Its president, Tony Perkins, released the following statement shortly after the decision was released:

We are pleased to learn today that the Kentucky Court of Appeals has an understanding that the freedom of the press also includes T-shirt presses. This is a case in which it is difficult to overstate the enormous implications for both free speech and religious freedom. The court was presented with this question: Does government have the power to force citizens to engage in speech they disagree with. The answer is a clear “no.”

This ruling affirms our nation’s long history of protecting Americans from being compelled by the government to advocate

a message to which one objects. We applaud our friends at Alliance Defending Freedom for prevailing over the notion that surrendering First Amendment rights is just the “price of doing business.”

Perkins added he is hopeful the U.S. Supreme Court will soon accept a similar religious liberty case involving Masterpiece Cakeshop owner Jack Phillips. He said Christian business owners should be free to follow their religious beliefs without fear of punishment by the government. {eoa}