

Two Florida State Lawmakers Sponsor Version of Pastor Protection Act

Two Florida lawmakers are in the process of drafting a bill that that, if passed, would protect Florida pastors and religious leaders in the future from having to perform same-sex marriages.

Florida State Representative Scott Plakon, R-Longwood, and State Senator Aaron Bean, R-Jacksonville, each began drafting separate versions of the bill prior to last Friday's Supreme Court ruling that legalized same-sex marriage in all 50 states. Plakon told Charisma News that he and Bean spoke for the first time Wednesday about the proposed bill and will continue to collaborate on it before introducing it before the Florida legislature.

"Senator Bean and I want to make it absolutely clear in Florida law that pastors and religious practitioners have First Amendment rights to practice their faith when it comes to marriages," said Plakon, who represents Florida's 29th District. "We've already spoken with a handful of pastors and they are very concerned about this and how it is progressing.

"The LGBT community says it has no interest in solemnizing these types of marriages in churches. Wasn't it five years or six years ago or so that President Obama and Hillary Clinton were for traditional marriage, and now, the other night, the White House gets lit up in rainbow colors? It's progressing quickly, and we need to put a backstop on this."

Last Friday, the Supreme Court of the United States ruled, by a 5-4 margin, that same-sex marriage is now the law of the land and will be recognized by all 50 states. Since then, public outcry among the Christian and conservative communities

has been rampant.

On Tuesday, Texas Governor Greg Abbott signed the Pastor Protection Act, a bill written by Senator Craig Estes that, “protects houses of worship, religious organizations and their employees and clergy or ministers, from being required to participate in a marriage or celebration or a marriage if it would violate a sincerely held religious belief.”

A pair of Tennessee lawmakers are reportedly drafting a similar bill.

Hannah Willard, Florida Equality Action, Inc.’s Central Florida field organizer, told Fox News 35 anchor Keith Landy in a television interview Wednesday night in which Plakon also participated that Plakon’s proposed bill is “completely unnecessary.”

“No pastor or church will be required to marry any couple that they wish not to marry,” Willard said. “That’s the way it’s always been, and it will continue to be the case. The recent Supreme Court ruling has nothing to do with pastors and churches that refrain or refuse to participate in same-sex marriage ceremonies.”

While such a law has not come to fruition for churches, other facets of society have been punished for their refusal to take part in same-sex marriages. A story from 2014 reported that Jack Phillips, who owns Masterpiece Cakeshop in Lakewood, Colorado, was ordered to make wedding cakes for gay couples and “guarantee that its staff be given comprehensive training on Colorado’s anti-discrimination laws after the state’s Civil Rights Commission determined the Christian baker violated the law by refusing to bake a wedding cake for a same-sex couple.

In February, an Oregon couple with a bakery in Gresham was ordered to pay \$150,000 to a lesbian couple that was refused service on religious grounds.

In 2013, when Elane Photography refused to photograph a same-sex commitment ceremony, it prompted the New Mexico Supreme Court to rule that wedding photographers could not refuse to shoot gay ceremonies.

And those are only a few of the situations that have arisen in recent years concerning Christians that refused to celebrate gay weddings.

“They say that churches, pastors and clergy are not targets,” Plakon said. “They say this bill is unnecessary. But, if you look at the way the courts have twisted the laws over the past few years, what is the harm in having this type of comfort and protection for pastors and clergy?”

Plakon says he feels confident that once the bill is drafted, it will garner a great deal of support.

“To pass legislation is a very difficult thing to do,” he said. “But at the end of the day, we should have the bipartisan support. It should be obvious that churches, pastors and clergy deserve this type of protection.”

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