

Washington Supreme Court Ordered to Take Fresh Look at Christian Florist's Case

The U.S. Supreme Court won't hear the case of Barronelle Stutzman, a Christian florist who was fined for refusing to provide flowers for a same-sex wedding.

Instead, the high court is ordering the Washington Supreme Court to take a fresh look at the case.

Stutzman has always maintained she was exercising her First Amendment rights when she refused to provide flowers for a gay wedding, explaining it goes against her Christian beliefs.

The couple, who had purchased flowers from Stutzman in the past, and state Attorney General Bob Ferguson sued her and won. That ruling was then unanimously upheld by the state's nine supreme court justices.

"This case is about crushing dissent. In a free America, people with differing beliefs must have room to coexist," Stutzman's attorney, Kristen Waggoner of the Alliance Defending Freedom, said after the Washington state court's 2017 ruling.

"The U.S. Supreme Court has rightfully asked the Washington Supreme Court to reconsider Barronelle's case in light of the *Masterpiece Cakeshop* decision," Waggoner explained. "In that ruling, the U.S. Supreme Court denounced government hostility toward the religious beliefs about marriage held by creative professionals like Jack and Barronelle. The state of Washington, acting through its attorney general, has shown similar hostility here."

"Barronelle, like Jack, serves all customers but declines to

create custom art that expresses messages or celebrates events in conflict with her deeply held religious beliefs," she said. "The Washington attorney general's efforts to punish her because he dislikes her beliefs about marriage are as impermissible as Colorado's attempt to punish Jack."

"This is not the end of this battle, but it is a positive step," said Dr. Jerry Johnson, president and CEO of National Religious Broadcasters. "The lower courts must now grapple with the Masterpiece Cakeshop mandate that the state expunge from its actions any bias against religious beliefs its officials may personally wish to crush. Just like Jack Phillips, Barronelle Stutzman is an upstanding citizen whose beliefs deserve respect."

Family Research Council President Tony Perkins said, "This is welcome news in light of the U.S. Supreme Court's decision in Jack Phillips' case. However, Barronelle Stutzman of Arlene's Flowers is still facing the same limitations on her freedom in Washington state. In an unprecedented show of religious hostility, the state's chief law enforcer, Bob Ferguson personally disparaged her by comparing her biblical beliefs on marriage to racial discrimination. The state attorney general sought to severely punish her with crippling fines to drive her out of business and even sued her personally, which could result in her home being taken away.

Perkins adds, "Our hope and prayer is that the lower court that ruled against Barronelle's religious freedom will acknowledge the grave error in their previous ruling and restore Barronelle's freedom to live out her deeply held convictions in her own business.

This is the second time the Supreme Court has passed on the chance to decide whether business owners can refuse to comply with anti-discrimination laws on religious grounds.

The justices did not fully address the matter when they ruled

in favor of Colorado baker Jack Phillips, who also declined to provide a same-sex wedding cake to a gay couple on the basis of his Christian convictions.

In that case, the high court simply ruled on his behalf because the Colorado commission's treatment of Phillips "showed elements of a clear and impermissible hostility toward the sincere religious beliefs motivating his objection."

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