

Christian Bakers Stick to Marriage Beliefs Despite Gay Agenda's Pressure

In a politically correct world, the cost of running a business is a lot more than dollars and cents. For Aaron and Melissa Klein, the owners of a small Oregon bakery, the price is their **First Amendment** rights. Their dream of opening a dessert shop near Portland, Ore., turned into a nightmare when two lesbians refused to take no for an answer on their request for a same-sex wedding cake.

Exactly one year ago, the Kleins explained they couldn't take the order because it would violate their faith to participate in a **same-sex marriage** ceremony. Furious, the women filed a complaint with the state. The story made national headlines, as the young couple became another face in the war on **religious liberty**.

"We still stand by what we believe from the beginning," Aaron Klein told reporters. "I'm not sure what the future holds, but as far as where we're at right now ... it's almost as if the state is hostile toward Christian businesses."

And the state isn't the only one. After word spread, the harassment in the liberal suburb of Portland became too much to take. The Kleins were forced to close their shop in Gresham and operate out of their home. Even there, the family was a target. Activists broke into their company truck and painted *bigot* across the side.

Now, 12 months later, the state of Oregon is weighing in—and not on the side of free speech and free exercise. Investigators from the state Bureau of Labor and Industries ruled late last week that the couple was guilty of discrimination and ordered the Kleins to settle. If they

refuse, the bureau threatens to bring formal charges.

Herbert Grey, the bakers' attorney, was flabbergasted. "They're being punished by the state of Oregon for refusing to participate in an event the state of Oregon does not recognize," he says.

Even the state constitution defines **marriage** the same way Aaron and Melissa do—and they're the ones being **persecuted**.

While the couple debates their next move, surrender is not an option. In a Facebook post to her 12,000 fans, Melissa thanked people for their support.

"I know that your prayers are being heard," she wrote. "I feel such a peace with all of this that is going on. Even though there are days that are hard ... we still feel that the Lord is in this. It is His fight and our situation is in His hands."

Meanwhile, **same-sex marriage** isn't legal in Illinois until June 1, but business owners are already bracing for it. Jim Walder hasn't allowed a civil union ceremony at TimberCreek Bed & Breakfast since its inception—and he doesn't plan on changing that policy anytime soon.

"As long as I own TimberCreek, there will never be a gay marriage at this venue," he says. Like the Kleins, Walder has been staring down the state's Human Rights Commission after a homosexual couple filed a grievance in 2011 for Walder's refusal to host their wedding.

Like most states with **same-sex marriage** laws, Illinois failed to protect business owners with moral objections.

"I totally support exemptions for everyone doing business in the wedding industry regarding civil unions or gay marriage," Walder says. "Our current legal predicament could be the predicament of other businesses in Paxton"—like caterers, photographers, cake bakers or wedding planners.

State Rep. Josh Harms (R), who voted against **same-sex marriage** in Illinois, is horrified that businesses will have to participate in same-sex marriage “even if their religion forbids it.” He’s working on legislation to exempt churches and religiously-affiliated organizations and schools but thinks a business exemption would be a tough sell.

Tough sell or no, the Thomas More Society thinks it’s time to go to bat for **religious freedom**. Tom Brejcha, who is on standby to file a suit the second an Illinois employer is punished for their marriage views, shakes his head at how backward America has become.

“The idea that free people can be ‘compelled by law to compromise the very religious beliefs that inspire their lives’ as the ‘price of citizenship’ is a chilling and unprecedented attack on freedom,” he told reporters.

For his part, Walder is ready to stand for truth—no matter what the outcome. Sure, the complaint caused them to lose a few weddings, but “that’s OK,” he explains. “Overall, our business is up substantially since the [couple] filed their complaint. We hosted 26 weddings last year.”

Tony Perkins *is president of Family Research Council.*