

Christian Florist Hit With Second Suit for Refusing to Service Gay Wedding

A Washington state florist who refused to sell flowers to a gay couple for their wedding has been sued by the American Civil Liberties Union, in the second legal action accusing the vendor of discrimination.

Florist Barronelle Stutzman already faced a consumer protection lawsuit over the incident filed against her last week by state Attorney General Bob Ferguson. She maintained her Christian beliefs prevented her from selling the flowers for the **same-sex wedding**, according to court papers.

The plaintiffs in the latest lawsuit filed on Thursday are Robert Ingersoll and Curt Freed, who are represented by the American Civil Liberties Union of Washington state.

The couple were longtime customers of Stutzman's southeast Washington state business, Arlene's Flowers, in Richland, their lawsuit said.

The legal battle follows a move by Washington state voters in November to allow gay marriage, but the ACLU's lawsuit is not based on the legality of **same-sex marriage** in the state.

Instead, it centers on the state's law prohibiting discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, said Doug Honig, spokesman for the ACLU of Washington state.

"Everybody is entitled to their own private religious beliefs and the ACLU respects that strongly," Honig said.

"But a business open to the public cannot use religion as a reason to justify discriminating," he said.

When Ingersoll entered Stutzman's store in March to buy flowers for his upcoming wedding to Freed, Stutzman told him she could not serve him "because of (her) relationship with Jesus Christ," according to the lawsuit filed last week by the attorney general.

Stutzman's attorney, Justin Bristol, said forcing his client to sell flowers for a gay wedding violated her constitutional rights of freedom of speech, association and religious exercise.

"She is one of the few people left today willing to stand by her convictions rather than compromise her beliefs," Bristol said. "She's a very nice lady and doesn't have a discriminatory bone in her body, but she doesn't want to be forced to participate in an event that she doesn't believe in."

The ACLU lawsuit, unlike the legal action from the attorney general's office, lists Freed and Ingersoll as plaintiffs and seeks damages on their behalf. The attorney general's office seeks fines against the business, but no damages for the two men.

Washington is one of nine states along with the District of Columbia that allow same-sex marriage.

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