

# Ted Cruz: Houston Has No Power to Silence the Church

Pastors in Houston are fighting back against an attempt by the mayor to silence them from the pulpit.

Some have been told to provide the government with their sermons. Now, they're getting a little help from one of the top conservative voices in the country: Sen. Ted Cruz, R-Texas.

On Thursday in Houston, Cruz visited his home church to give city officials a lesson on religious liberty.

"The city of Houston has no power, no legal authority to silence the Church," he said.

The controversy began over a city ordinance that not only bans discrimination against LGBT people; it also allows them to choose which bathroom they want to use.

That's when pastors in Houston said "enough."

"There's no such thing as anti-gay in the course of this at all, but we are for God's standard of morality," Dave Welch, executive director of the Texas Pastor Council, said.

Citizens signed petitions to overturn the ordinance and gathered enough to force a vote, but the Houston City Council declared the signatures invalid.

The Christian advocates behind the petition sued.

Then, in an attempt to fight back, the city demanded to see sermons, texts, emails or any correspondence whatsoever from pastors against the ordinance. That would have included any preaching about homosexuality or gender identity.

Pastors stood their ground and refused to comply.

In an exclusive interview with CBN News, Cruz says he hopes Christians take notice of what's happening here.

"Is this a situation where a sleeping giant has awoken?" CBN News's David Brody asked Cruz.

"I think it may well be. I certainly hope that it is," the Texas lawmaker replied.

"I never imagined we would see this kind of hostility to faith here in Houston," he added.

Neither can Pastor Khan Huynh, who came to America from Vietnam to get away from persecution. Now his name is on the government hit list.

"This is what's going on. They censor all the sermons. Pastors have to print out worship service programs and they have to approve it before we can conduct our service," Pastor Huynh told CBN News about treatment of pastors in Vietnam.

The city of Houston begs to differ. City officials are trying to downplay the idea their actions are an assault on religious liberty.

Houston's openly lesbian mayor, Annise Parker, is pushing the LGBT ordinance. She's also downplaying the controversy and says pastoral critics don't understand the concept of unconditional love.

"People are rightly concerned if a government entity in any way tries to inhibit religious speech. That's not the intent," she said.

The city now says it will narrow the subpoenas and not require all the information it originally wanted.

But the pastors aren't buying it.

“The mayor and the city attorney they did this. This is not an accident. This is not some pro-bono attorney who did it and they didn’t know. This was their plan all along. They just thought no one would stand up and say anything,” said Steve Riggle, pastor of Grace Community Church.

Meanwhile, Cruz warns pastors across the nation that they must lead the way or the future may look even worse.

“The specter of government trying to determine if what pastors preach from the pulpit meets with the policy views or political correctness of the governing authorities—that prospect is real and happening now,” he said.

In Houston, however, pastors are ready for the fight, whatever the cost.