

Exhibit M

Joey Songy

From: Mike Armour <MARMOUR@mississippi.org>
Sent: Monday, April 04, 2016 11:02 AM
To: Clay Foster; Joe Rutherford (joe.rutherford@journalinc.com)
Subject: FW: News

Sharing what's out there...

From: Mississippi Center for Public Policy [mailto:mail@mspolicy.org]
Sent: Monday, April 04, 2016 10:08 AM
Subject: Truth About the Freedom of Conscience Bill

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The Truth About the Freedom of Conscience Bill

By Forest Thigpen

If all the things being said by the opponents of HB 1523 were true, I would be against it as well.

But they are not.

Some opponents of the "Protecting Freedom of Conscience from Government Discrimination Act," including Clarion Ledger Executive Editor Sam Hall, make the outlandish assertion that this bill would allow a person to be "refused service at a restaurant, not allowed to shop at a grocery store," and other sweeping generalizations. Sam says these are in "specific, detailed language" in the bill, but the words "restaurant" or "grocery store" appear nowhere in the bill, nor does any provision for those businesses to keep people out.

HB1523 does not create any protection for businesses that deny service to a person based on sexual orientation. The bill is confined almost exclusively to wedding-related services that may be declined, and only under certain circumstances.

Here's why that's in the bill. Many merchants, such as bakers, and many professionals, such as attorneys, have said they gladly serve their customers regardless of sexual orientation, but they draw the line at assisting in a wedding ceremony, which they consider a sacrament or act of worship, if that ceremony would violate their beliefs about God's design for that form of worship.

Newspaper Guilty of Denial of Service?

Let's look at another form of denying service to a person seeking to exercise a Constitutional right. Should I be able to sue the Clarion-Ledger if it chooses not to print my comments? That's a "denial of service" for my right to free speech – a right which is explicitly stated in the Constitution.

If you oppose HB1523 – and if you want to be consistent – you would have to believe that I could sue, or the government could punish the newspaper for denying my right to express my views.

Other distortions about what HB 1523 supposedly does concern foster care and adoption. The bill clarifies that a religious organization like Catholic Charities does not have to abandon its faith in order to continue providing foster care services in Mississippi. Some states and cities have banned such groups for politely declining to place children with same-sex couples.

I'm not saying you have to agree with that stance by those organizations. But given that no one was forced to use their services, and there were other providers that would make those placements, was it really worth it to ban them from participating in the program?

There are two employment provisions in the bill. One would allow businesses, schools, and religious organizations to set dress codes and to keep men out of women's bathrooms, dressing rooms, showers, etc. The bill does not require those restrictions; it merely says you can't be punished by the government for choosing those policies.

The other is a protection for public employees who express their views about marriage on their own time. This protection would apply to a situation like the one in Atlanta, where Fire Chief Kelvin Cochran was fired because he wrote a Bible study on his own time that briefly referenced the Bible's views on sexual morality.

Who is Forcing Whose Views on Others?

After the Roe v. Wade decision, many states enacted conscience protections for health professionals whose deeply-held beliefs would not allow them to assist in performing an abortion. HB1523 is a similar response to a Supreme Court decision on another issue that created potential conflicts for people of faith.

President Obama's own Solicitor General, when arguing the same-sex marriage case before the Supreme Court, said that respecting rights of conscience of those who disagree "is going to depend on how States work [it out] ... and how they decide what kinds of accommodations they are going to allow under state law. And different states could strike different balances."

Our society, I hope, would never be alright with the government forcing an African-American t-shirt shop to design and print shirts for a Klan parade, even if that parade is legally organized. We would never think of forcing a Jewish baker to make a swastika-adorned cake for a neo-Nazi wedding, which is also legal to hold. Why would we think it's OK to force a religious business owner to assist in a wedding ceremony that violates his or her deeply-held beliefs, simply because it is now legal to hold such events?

HB1523 is not forcing anyone's views on anyone else. On the contrary, it is protecting people from having someone else's views forced on them to violate the tenets of their faith regarding marriage.

Some have said the bill pits one person's religious views against another, but consider the effect of each: a person who "denies service" is not preventing a same-sex couple from exercising their right to get married.* But if the couple prevails, it is preventing the objector from exercising his or her freedom of religion. HB1523 is a narrowly-tailored measure that provides a reasonable balance for those competing rights.

If we head down the road of having the government force us to abandon our religious beliefs, especially when reasonable alternatives are available, where will it end? What will be left of the freedom of religion?

** A Circuit Clerk will not be protected under this bill if a license is not provided to a same-sex couple "without delay." The Clerk may "seek recusal," but one of the conditions of that recusal is that the Clerk "shall take all steps necessary to ensure that the...licensing...is not impeded or delayed..." Thus, if the license is delayed, the Clerk has not met the conditions for protection under this bill.*

Mississippi Center for Public Policy, 520 George Street, Jackson, MS 39202

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Joey Songy

From: John Boykin
Sent: Tuesday, April 05, 2016 9:28 AM
To: Joey Songy
Subject: FW: Truth About the Freedom of Conscience Bill.docx
Attachments: Thigpen Email on HB1523 - Truth About the Freedom of Conscience Bill.docx

From: Forest Thigpen [mailto:thigpen@mspolicy.org]
Sent: Tuesday, April 05, 2016 9:20 AM
To: John Boykin
Subject: Truth About the Freedom of Conscience Bill.docx

Attached – and pasted below – is the content of a message we sent to our email list, a shorter version of which is posted on Clarion Ledger and MS Business Journal online.

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